ב"ה

ESSAYS ON PIRKEI AVOS MISHNAH ONE

ADAPTED FROM THE WORKS OF THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

By

HESCHEL GREENBERG

Edited by Rabbi Dr. Yisroel Ber Kaufman
o.b.m.

ESSAYS ON PIRKEI AVOS

MISHNAH ONE
ADAPTED FROM THE WORKS OF THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

Translated, adapted and annotated by

Rabbi Heschel Greenberg

Edited by Rabbi Dr. Yisroel Ber Kaufmann o.b.m.

Made possible with a grant from *Va'ad L'hafotzas Sichos*

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION
ESSAY ONE: THE ORDER OF TRANSMISSION
ESSAY TWO: THE FIVE PREREQUISITES
ESSAY THREE: AVOS ACCORDING TO PARDES
ESSAY FOUR-JOINING OPPOSITES
ESSAY FIVE: ONE RECIPIENT
ESSAY SIX: A LESSON FOR RABBIS
ESSAY SEVEN: THE PROPHET SAGE
ESSAY EIGHT: TAKE AND GIVE
ESSAY NINE: EARLIER AND LATER MORALITY
ESSAY TEN: PRACTICAL TORAH
ESSAY ELEVEN: REFINEMENT THROUGH TORAH
ESSAY TWELVE: AS IT IS TAUGHT IN HEAVEN

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

In honor of the illustrious day, *Yud Aleph Nissan*-the eleventh day of Nissan, the 115th birthday of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, we are publishing, with G-d's help, the rRebbe's essays on the first Mishnah of Pirkei Avos.

This introduction constitutes the second installment of a voluminous work: the translation and adaptation of the Rebbe's talks and discourses on the classic Pirkei Avos.

Pirkei Avos is one the most cherished classics of Judaism. Although it is a part of a larger classic—the Mishnah—it is without any question the most popular section of the Oral tradition. Countless editions have been published, hundreds and thousands of commentaries have been composed, and millions of Jews have recited her sagacious, beautiful and inspiring words for centuries.

But as with all other parts of Torah, Chassidus has added a new perspective, probing beneath the surface to find the soul

of the text. Pirkei Avos is no exception to the light that has been shined on Torah by the Chassidic masters.

Our generation, in particular, has been fortunate in having the Lubavitcher Rebbe as its leader and mentor. There is not an area of Torah knowledge—from Biblical and Talmudic literature to Kabbalah and Chassidus—that has not been illuminated by the Rebbe's profound and radiant teachings. In addition to the Rebbe's focus on taking generations of Chassidic teaching and bringing it down to our level, the Rebbe has also added novel insights that place the text in a refreshing new light.

Fortunately, for our generation, much of what the Rebbe has contributed in his thousands of talks and discourses have been committed to writing. There are about 150 volumes of these talks and another 50 volumes of the Rebbe's correspondence and other works that have been published to date, and many more that await publication. And we are doubly fortunate that many of these published talks have been translated into English and other languages.

* * *

The Rebbe has frequently given lengthy discourses on Pirkei Avos (known popularly as "Ethics of the Fathers" but more accurately rendered as "Chapters of the Fathers"). *Va'ad L'Hafotzas Sichos* has published a two-volume anthology *Biurim l'Pirkei Avos*, on Pirkei Avos, the fourth edition appearing in 1996, culling from hundreds of the Rebbe's talks. However, this excellent anthology does not present the Rebbe's talks in their entirety. Only the main points were selected to give one easy access to the Rebbe's insights in capsule form, but they do not capture, nor were they intended to capture, the full flavor and depth of the original.

There have been, to the best of my knowledge three different English anthologies, culled from the Rebbe's works on Pirkei Avos. They are excellent works, and the translator is indebted to them for the pioneering task of adapting the Rebbe's talks on Pirkei Avos, which proved invaluable in putting together this collection of essays. However, these works, like their Hebrew counterpart, contain only excerpts of the Rebbe's lengthy discourses, and/or

adaptations of only a small percentage of what the Rebbe has said on Pirkei Avos over the years.

The current project was to take the Rebbe's talks in their entirety and have them translated and adapted into English, so that one can savor at least some of the flavor of the original. To give the reader a sense of the difference in scope: The anthologized version of the introduction in *Biurim l'Pirkei Avos* that this introduction is based on, is less than a fifth of what has been translated in this English adaptation. (In addition, much of the introduction there deals with the connections between the chapters of Avos. These commentaries were not translated for this volume, and will be included, G-d willing, in future volumes.)

However, not all the essays were translated directly from one talk. There are occasions where the Rebbe's comment may have been an isolated one that occupies only a paragraph, or a footnote. or two in a talk that focuses on an entirely different topic. Invariably, there was some essay that connected to that short comment and it was

"woven in" and incorporated into either the text or a footnote of that essay.

It is also important to bear in mind that many of the talks from which these essays were culled were based exclusively on a listener's account. In addition, most of the Rebbe's discussions on Pirkei Avos were on a Shabbos, when the only tool available to preserve these talks was memory. And although, the people charged with the responsibility to retain the Rebbe's talks (that lasted some three to six hours on a Shabbos afternoon), were competent, inadvertent errors certainly could have crept into the text. Only a **small** percentage of these talks were reviewed and edited for publication by the Rebbe personally. They have been collected and included in the 39 volume *Likkutei Sichos* and the 12 volume *Sefer Hasichos* series.

* * *

When the classic discourse of the Rebbe, The Essence of Chassidus, was published 26 years ago by *Va'ad l'hafotzas Sichos* as a gift to the Rebbe on the occasion of his 76th birthday,

the Rebbe remarked to a member of his secretariat that he hoped that his works would not be translated literally. Rather, the Rebbe expressed his desire that they be written as if they were originally written in English. And while this poses a formidable challenge to any translator and editor, it is our hope that we did not deviate too far from the Rebbe's wishes.

* * *

This book consists of twelve essays that explain the first Mishnah of Pirkei Avos.

* * *

I am grateful to Rabbi Zalman Chanin of the Vaad L'hatotzas Sichos for his financial support for this project and for his dedication to the publishing and dissemination of the Rebbe's works.

* * *

The Rebbe on several occasions connected the study of Pirkei Avos with the coming of Moshiach. So it is my fervent wish and hope that this modest contribution to the dissemination of the *Rebbe's* essays on Pirkei

Avos will hasten the day when we will all see the Rebbe lead us to *Eretz Yisroel*, with the imminent *Geulah Sheleimah*, may it happen immediately!

I want to dedicate the publication of this volume to the memory of the editor Rabbi Dr. Yisroel Ber Kaufman of blessed memory, who passed away just a few months ago. May we see soon the fulfillment of the promise, "And those who repose in the earth shall awaken and sing," with the imminent coming of Moshiach and the Final Redemption.

Our most fervent prayer is to see the full revelation of Moshiach, so we can hear once again his brilliant and inspiring expositions of Pirkei Avos along with all the other new dimensions of Torah—*Torah Chadashah me'iti teitzei*—that will be revealed, with the imminent coming of Moshiach and the genuine and complete Redemption.

Heschel Greenberg
22 Nissan, 5775
Williamsville, New York

CHAPTER ONE

MISHNAH ONE

Moses received the Torah from Sinai, and passed it on to Joshua, Joshua to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, the Prophets passed it one to the Men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many students and make a fence around the Torah.

BARTINURA

Moses received the Torah from Sinai. I say that the reason this tractate begins with "Moses received the Torah from Sinai" is because this Tractate is not based on a commentary of any of the Torah's commandments, as are all the other Tractates of the Mishnah. Rather, it is devoted to the discussion of ethics and proper character traits exclusively.. Even secular scholars have written books on the subjects of ethics and how to interact with one another, that they made up. This author thus teaches us that

the ethical and moral teachings of this tractate were not contrived by the Sages of the Mishnah, but were also given at Sinai.

From Sinai, from the One who was revealed at Sinai.

To the Elders, who lived for an extensive period after the days of Joshua. Those [original] elders passed it on to other elders [of subsequent generations] until it reached the beginning of the era of the Prophets, i.e., Eli and Shmuel HaRamasi.

To the Men of the Great Assembly, [that consisted of 120] elders. [Among them were:] *Zerubavel Sarayih, Ralaia Moredechai, Balhson,* all of whom lived in the days of Ezra when they came up from the Diaspora in the Second Temple era. [Also] included [in this group] were [the prophets] Chagai, Zecharia, Malachai and Nehemiah ben Chaklaya and their colleagues.

They were accorded the title "Great Assembly" because they "restored the crown to its original position." (*Yoma* 69b): "Moses said 'The great, mighty and awesome G-d.'" Jeremiah and Daniel came and they did not

say "mighty and awesome." They, [the Men of the Great Assembly] restored it to the way it was said originally. They said: 'these [acts of destruction], demonstrate precisely his might and his awesomeness. For if not for that how could a nation such as this have survived in the face of so many nations.'"

They said three things. They, in fact, said many things. However, these three things that they said represent teachings that sustain the Torah.

Be deliberate in judgment- If a case comes before you

ESSAY ONE

THE ORDER OF TRANSMISSION

ESSAY ONE

THE ORDER OF TRANSMISSION

1.

This Mishnah appears to comprise two distinct themes. The first segment of the Mishnah describes the order of the transmission of the Torah. Moses received it from Sinai and had then transmitted it to subsequent generations until it reached the Men of the Great Assembly. The Mishnah then follows with a second completely unrelated segment, i.e., the Men of the Great Assembly's prescription for proper comportment.

We must try to understand why the author consolidated these two disparate themes,

while he could have separated them into two separate sections.[1]

[1] The division of the Mishnah is precise and is relevant to the way we understand a Mishnah. For example: There are certain rules that hinge on whether a certain law is mentioned in the beginning of the Mishnah or the end. There are also legal implications of the division of the Mishnah, whether or not a law is written as a separate Mishnah or is incorporated within another one. *Chelkas Mechokek* (*Even HoEzer*, 36:40) discusses the law concerning the laws of marriage. If a man marries a woman with the stipulation that he knows how to "learn." Knowing how to learn means to know at least three *Mishnayos*. (This is consonant with the view of the *Tur* with respect to one whose stipulation is that he knows how to read scripture, wherein three verses will suffice.)

That the number of *Mishnayos* is deemed important is evident from the Mishnah in *Kilayim* (Chapter 7) where one Mishnah is numbered "Mishnah 4 and 5." See commentary *Hon Ashir* (by the author of the *Mishnas Chassidim,* cited in the commentary "*Tosphos Anshei Shem*" on that Mishnah) where this anomaly is explained according to the teachings of Kabbalah. One may suggest that this Mishnah would be regarded as two distinct ones with respect to the laws of marriage, where he stipulates that he knows how to learn.

Furthermore, what compelled the author to say that Moses handed it to Joshua and Joshua handed it to the Elders and the elders to the prophets and the prophets to the Men of the Great Assembly? What is the relevance of the knowledge of all these details in the transmission of the Torah? The author could have stated concisely that Moshe received the Torah at Sinai and transmitted it—from generation to generation—to future generations, until it reached the Men of the Great Assembly?

The difficulty here is magnified when we realize that the author does not really give us all the links in the chain of tradition. Between Moses and the Men of the Great Assembly there were other generations. For example, the era of Prophets comprised several generations, as did the era of the Elders, all listed in the introduction to both Maimonides' *Yad HaChazakah* as well as his Commentary on the Mishnah.

Why then—if the author is not really intent on enumerating **all** the generations—did he find it necessary to mention specifically the

generations of Joshua, the Elders and the Prophets?

There is another matter that needs to be clarified. One of the links mentioned in our Mishnah is "the Prophets." It is clear that their role in receiving the Torah from the Elders as well as their role in transmitting the Torah to the Men of the Great Assembly did not hinge on their status as prophets, since a prophet may not invoke prophecy in matters of Torah. The Torah emphatically negates interjecting prophecy into matters of Torah law: "Torah is not in Heaven!"[2] While a Prophet may get involved in the process of adjudicating Torah law, he may do so as a scholar, basing his decision on his **understanding** of the law, but not because he received the knowledge prophetically.

Why then does the author characterize these Sages—who lived between the period of the Elders and the Men of the Great Assembly—as "prophets," considering the fact that this

[2] See Rambam's introduction to his *Commentary on the Mishnah* for a lengthy treatment of this matter.

appellation has absolutely nothing to do with the transmission of the Torah?

We are compelled to conclude that the selective listing of generations in the chain of tradition is intended, not as a historical primer, but as a guide for each and every individual in his study of Torah. Moses, Joshua, the Elders, the Prophets and the Men of the Great Assembly are not just names of people or the historical periods to which they correlate; they are the titles of characteristics that we all must possess and through which Torah study must develop. Each and every soul possesses a Moses, Joshua, Elders, Prophets and Men of the Great Assembly.

This now sheds light as to why the Mishnah only lists **these** few historical periods, notwithstanding the existence of other historical links. Only those corresponding soul faculties and characteristics that are relevant to us because they serve as a guide in our service of G-d are listed. [3]

[3] This thought is analogous to the statement of our ages that "only prophecies that were relevant for

Prophecy, though not a proper medium for transmitting Torah knowledge, is a conceptual prerequisite for students of Torah. When a person studies Torah, in addition to the intellectual soul-powers that are needed, there is also a need to harness one's "prophetic" potential.

With this premise, we can also explain why Moses, notwithstanding his status as the greatest prophet,[4] is not described as a Prophet in this Mishnah, while Sages of a much lower prophetic caliber are referred to as such. The name Moses in the Mishnah alludes to the soul-faculty entitled "Moses" that every Jew must unleash in his study of Torah. It is not the trait of Moses' prophecy that we need to access; rather it is the higher

---

future generations were transcribed. Those that were not were not transcribed. (*Megillah* 14a).

[4] "No prophet has arisen like Moses" (Deuteronomy 34:10). *Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah,* end of chapter 7 and beginning of chapter 8. From the discussion there it appears that the Moses' Torah status relates to his prophetic prowess. This is not the place to discuss the matter further.

attribute of Moses itself that we need in the study of Torah.

II

The first trait that one must invest in Torah study must be the "Moses-faculty" of one's soul. From there one must access and harness the "Joshua-faculty" of their soul and continue onward with the "Elder-faculty," the "Prophet-faculty" until one reaches the point where they involve their "Men of the Great Assembly-faculty" in the process of Torah study.[5]

[5] Translated into the Kabalistic lexicon of *Sefirot, "*Moses" represents the attribute of Chochma *I'la'ah*, Higher-level wisdom. "Joshua"—who was Moses' attendant—represents *Chochma ta'ta'ah*, lower level *Chochma* as it is incorporated within *Chochma I'la'ah*. "Elders"—the etymology of the Hebrew word for elder, *zaken* relates to the term that means, "he who acquired wisdom"—represents *Mochin,* the general intellectual attributes—from which also the emotional attributes derive. "Prophets " correspond to the attributes of *netzach* and *hod*, victory and submission. "Men of the Great Assembly" corresponds to the attribute of *Malchus*, sovereignty. This is based on the fact that *Malchus* is also

We can understand the "Moses-faculty" involvement in the process of study, by referring to the statement of the Talmud[6] that the first thing that a father should teach his child when he begins to speak is the verse, "Torah was commanded to us by Moses."[7] Even before the child is capable of intellectually grasping any of the ideas of Torah, its introduction to Torah is with this verse and its reference to Moses.

When the child matures it is introduced to the formal study of *Vayikra*, the Book of Leviticus.[8] When the child first learns to speak, its very first introduction to Torah, however, is with the verse "Torah was commanded to us by Moses." This is

---

referred to as *Knessess Yisroel*, the Assembly of Israel, as is well known. When *Malchus* is elevated to its source by way of one's service, it is then accorded the enhanced appellation of, "**great** assembly."

[6] *Sukkah* 42a. *Alter Rebbe's Hilchos Talmud Torah*, beginning of chapter one.

[7] [Deuteronomy 33:4]

[8] *Vayikra Rabbah* 7:3. See *Likkutei Sichos* Volume 22, p. 1-6.

underlies the opening statement of our Mishnah: "**Moses** received the Torah from Sinai." One's first introduction to receiving the Torah is to invoke the concept of. Moses.

What does Moses signify in terms of one's introduction to Torah?

Moses personified the trait of humility and absolute self-abnegation. One verse that poignantly describes Moses personality is where he responds to his detractors, "And what are we?" This expression of humility is representative of the trait of *Chochma*,[9] the first step in the process of acquiring Torah knowledge. One must be first self-effacingly

[9] [In Chassidic thought the soul's first expression is referred to as C*hocmah* which is a composite of two words: *Coach mah*, it is an amorphous non-descript power. In other words, when the soul first begins to manifest itself, its nature is still undefined, amorphous. If we had to characterize the faculty of Chochma, we would have to ay that it is a paradoxical non-force force. Its identity is defined by virtue of its submission to another identity that it is attempting to grasp. When you look at a C*hochma* driven individual you see a person who has no ego, and whose sole preoccupation is to absorb that which is higher than itself.-Translator's note]

submit to the knowledge that he is trying to grasp, before actually engaged in the process of assimilating and comprehending the knowledge. .

In practical terms the "Moses" approach does not allow for one's expressive-self to be involved in Torah study, at least not at the outset. We do not begin to receive the Torah with our emotions, or even with intellectual comprehension. Torah study must be initiated by our total devotion and subordination.[10] Despite the fact that this trait is ascribed to Moses, it is in the possession of every Jew.[11] This is particularly true, when one considers the "Moses" component that each of us has embedded in their soul.[12]

From the "Moses" attitude of total submission, one continues to the Joshua

[10] The word "Sinai" also represents the ideal of humility and submission, as is explained in *Likkutei Sichos*, volume 1, *Parshas Behar*. See there for cross-references.

[11] See *Tanya*, chapter 19.

[12] See *Tanya,* chapter 42.

mindset, the latter being the natural expression and corollary of the former. Joshua's trait was exemplified by his behavior. "He would not depart from the tent,"[13] is the laudatory statement the Torah makes about him. He was tenaciously attached to his teacher Moses' teachings. The extent to which he was devoted to Moses is expressed in the Midrashic narrative[14] concerning Moses desire to have his children succeed him as the Jewish leaders. According to the Midrash, G-d, however, told him that Joshua would be his successor because: "The one who guards the fruit shall partake of it."[15] G-d implied that Joshua was equipped to be Moses' successor, because his attachment to Moses exceeded that of a child. Joshua was the very "guardian of the fruit;" he guarded and never departed from Moses' tent.

Practically speaking, the "Joshua" mindset with regard to Torah study parallels that of a child who has gone beyond the stage

[13] *Shemos* 33:11.

[14] *Bamidbar Rabbah*, 21:14. *Tanchuma, Pinchas* 11.

[15] *Mishlei* 27:18.

speaking. When the child gets a bit older and is able to understand, one has to accustom the child[16] to "never depart from the tent," to be engaged in Torah study the entire day. A child does not learn this way because he appreciates the preciousness of Torah. A child, obviously, is not capable of appreciating this. Rather, a child's obsession with Torah is based solely on "*Kabbalas Ol*, accepting of the yoke," i.e., acceptance of authority that derives from the submissive nature of *Chochma.* This process thus parallels the trait of Joshua, the disciple of Moses.

The "Moses" faculty **precedes** the formal learning process inasmuch as it is the quintessential state of submission. One's submission is not merely a functional one, such as a person who follows orders, but it is an abstract sense of self-abnegation that does not manifest itself in any defined form. Even the scant intellectual involvement of a small child who studies Torah would reflect some

[16] See *Alter Rebbe's Hilchos Talmud Torah*, 1:10: "Teachers of Scripture to children…are required…to train them to learn by day and by night. One should not interrupt children from learning at all, except…"

defined measure of intellectual identity. The submissive character of the Moses-faculty is analogous to the child who has just begun to talk, as was discussed earlier, where there is absolutely no comprehension.

By contrast, the "Joshua-servant of Moses" faculty does manifest itself in an identifiable form, albeit one of submission rather than self-expression. The child's learning is motivated by his acceptance of authority, whereby "the youth did not depart from the tent."

With this understanding of the "Joshua-trait" of tenacious devotion to Torah study motivated by acceptance of authority, we can appreciate the use of the phrase "Moses received the Torah at Sinai and **passed it on** to Joshua." The Hebrew word employed here is not *limad* or *nasan* that he taught it to Joshua or gave it to Joshua, rather it is, "*u'mesarah,"* which has the connotation of a dedicated passing on of his teachings to his disciple, Joshua. In order to instill the trait of "never departing from the tent," characteristic of Joshua, one must have a teacher who is

totally dedicated to imparting knowledge to his disciple.

When the child matures even more, and is capable of understanding, one must graduate to the next level. The child must learn Torah in a manner of understanding and comprehension. Submitting to authority will clearly not suffice. One's learning must be an intellectual as well as an enjoyable experience.

This is what the Mishnah means: "And Joshua to the Elders." The term elder connotes wisdom and intellect.[17] After one possesses the acceptance of authority characterized by Joshua, one must study Torah in the manner that is represented by "the Elders."

"From the Elders to the Prophets," is a reference to the need to instill a measure of

[17] The Hebrew word for elder, *zaken*, the Talmud (*Kiddushin* 32b) states, comprises three words, *zeh shekanah chochmah*, this one who has acquired wisdom." (This follows the version of the *Toras Kohanim*, and as cited by *Rashi:* "It is an expression of *notrikon,* as *Ta'amei Hamitzvos*, end of *Parshas Kedoshim* – that he is called *zeh*.

"prophetic inspiration" into one's intellectual approach to Torah study.

An illustration of how there can be an element of prophecy in Torah study—despite the admonition that Torah is not in Heaven—can be seen in the following example. Notwithstanding the fact that the Torah was introduced into the realm of human intellect and that "Torah is not in Heaven," nevertheless, when the Talmudic Sages, the *Ta'naim* and *Amoraim,* had to issue a ruling of Jewish law, they would first "see" the laws of the Torah as they existed in their spiritual world. Once they knew the spiritual dimension of the law they would then "download" this information into their intellectual faculties.[18] Since the final determination of law was based not on their spiritual vision but on "down-to-earth" logical principles, the statement that "Torah is not in Heaven" was irrelevant. Whatever they saw in the spiritual realm was only a preface to the

[18] *Biurei HaZohar, Vayishlach* 20b. See also *Zohar*, III, 244b.

ruling of Jewish law that they arrived at after applying basic logic to the matter.[19]

With this premise in mind we can answer a well-known question concerning the role of Elijah the prophet in resolving matters of Jewish law. In response to questions for which the Talmud could not resolve, the Talmud often concludes: *Teiku*. Literally it means, "It remains unresolved." There is, however, a well-known acronym that this word forms: "*Tishbi yitaretz kushyos*

[19] An analogy to this premise can be found in regard to the proscription against plagiarism (*Magen Avrohom*, 156. If one were to assimilate the material until it becomes totally absorbed within one's mind, after hearing the idea from another, the prohibition would not apply. This premise is helpful in understanding why R. Eliezer the Great would make many statements without quoting the source of these teachings, which was his teacher, despite the fact that "he never said anything that he did not hear from his teacher (*Sukkah* 27b). Once he assimilated these teachings they did, indeed, become his own. It would be untenable to suggest that it was because he had only one teacher (*Yevamos* 96B) because he clearly stressed "his teachers," in the plural (*Sanhedrin* 68a). (Excerpted from the talk of the Festival of *Shavuos*, 5718.

v'abayos-Elijah will answer [unresolved] questions and queries."[20] The question is asked, how does this reconcile with the principle that "Torah is not in Heaven?" How could Elijah the Prophet resolve matters of Torah law?[21]

In light of the foregoing analysis however, it is clear that Elijah will only answer questions and issue rulings of Jewish law based on logic and rational principles. His prophetic role will only serve as a prelude for the logical ruling.

All of this can be applied to the role of prophecy in our study and transmission of Torah. Notwithstanding the absence of prophecy in our day and age,[22] one must still resort to a form of prophecy in order to arrive at the correct decision in matters of Jewish law. In order to find the true meaning of Torah one must be a *yerei shamayim*, a G-

[20] [*See Tosphos Yom Tov,* end of *Ediyot.*]

[21] See the references cited in *Sdei Chemed*, entry: "It is not in Heaven," and in several other sources.

[22] [See Likkutei Sichos, volume 10, Parshas Shoftim. Sefer Hasichos, 5751, Shoftim-Translator's note].

d fearing individual.[23] One must fear issuing an incorrect decision. Equipped with this sense of reverence for G-d, one will be much more cautious in the manner that they reach a legal decision. Utilizing the tools of logic, they will then be better equipped to discover the truth.

This will also explain why one cannot draw any definitive conclusions from a statement of law in the Talmud unless it was articulated as a "practical ruling."[24] A theoretical discussion of a legal matter is not reliable enough upon which to base one's practical decision. The logic behind this is that when a law is discussed in a theoretical context one

[23] See also *Biurei Hazohar* ibid, where it states that notwithstanding our inability to have the spiritual comprehension as did the *Ta'naim* and *Amoraim*, nevertheless, when we study the laws with the reasons provided for us by the aforementioned Sages, it can be compared to a blind person who follows a seeing person, who follows the correct path as does the one who can see. However, this will only be true if one studies Torah imbued with fear of Heaven. It is not so when… See there for a lengthy exposition of this matter.

[24] *Bava Basra* 130b.

may not delve into the depths of the subject, as one would do when he knows that the subject relates to a practical matter. When one deals with a relevant and practical matter that will impact on the real life, one will acquire a far more profound understanding of the subject, owing to the trepidation of erring, G-d forbid.[25]

We can now also clarify a saying of our Sages[26] on the verse that was applied to King David: "And G-d is with him." The Talmud explains that this means "the Halacha accords with him." In order to accurately find the right decision in matters of law, one cannot rely on one's intellect. One must also have "G-d with him," the essence of *yiras shamayim*, the fear of heaven.

Once one has acquired the trait of "the Elders," by investing one's **mind** in the study of Torah, one must also possess the trait that is analogous to prophecy, i.e., *yiras shamayim*, awareness and fear of heaven, in order to

[25] See discourse entitled "*VaHashem amar* 5767 (in the series of discourses of 5766) and onward.

[26] *Sanhedrin* 93b.

facilitate reaching the correct conclusions in matters of law.

The Mishnah then proceeds to the next and final step in the acquisition of Torah characteristics.

"The Prophets passed it on to the men of the Great Assembly." After attaining the level of prophecy as it pertains to Torah study, one then reaches an even more advanced level of Torah study—the level of the "Men of the Great Assembly."

We can understand how this body of Sages corresponds to a level of Torah study by citing the Talmud's discussion about one of their key accomplishments. The Talmud [27]states that the Men of the Great Assembly "restored the crown to its original position." When the Jewish people saw how the "Heathens were dancing in His Sanctuary" they ceased according G-d in their prayers the title "the Awesome one," with the argument, "Where is His awesomeness?" Moreover, when they subsequently saw how the "heathens were oppressing His children,"

[27] *Yoma* 69b.

they stopped saying "the Mighty one," in their prayers. "Where is His strength?"

Finally, the Men of the Great Assembly restored the recitation of the two appellations, awesome and mighty. Their rationale for this was that, on the contrary, "these is His might and this is His awesomeness." G-d's might and awesomeness is expressed in the very fact that the Heathens were dancing in His Sanctuary etc.

How does this apply to Torah study?

G-d's Sanctuary still exists, despite the destruction of the Temple, in the form of Torah study. "G-d has nothing in this world, save for the four cubits of *Halacha*."[28] It is possible, however, for the "Heathens to dance" in this Sanctuary, when man's evil impulse cloaks itself in the mantle of Torah and perverts its true meaning and thereby attempts to drag a Jew off the proper path. The *Rebbe Rashab*'s aphorism echoes this sentiment: The *Yetzer Hara*-evil impulse, the animal soul of man "can be a pious animal

[28] *Berachos* 8a.

soul and even a Chassidic animal soul."[29] Despite the pain and anguish the *Yetzer Hara* will experience by posing as a pious and Chassidic impulse, it is well worth his temporary pain if this will enable him to succeed in throwing a Jew of course.

In these precarious conditions, whereby the evil impulse has succeeded in most profound concealment of G-dly presence, the Men of the Great Assembly succeeded. Despite the degradation of G-d that occurs when one utilizes Torah—G-d's wisdom, which is "one and inseparable from G-d"—to go against Him, the Men of the Great Assembly were able to retort the G-dly equilibrium. They provided us with the inspiration to not let this deplorable state of affairs deter us in our pursuit of Torah. Not only will the darkness not cause us to falter, but also, on the contrary, will elicit an increased measure light that comes out of darkness.

Despite the inclusion of "Men of the Great Assembly" among all the other levels of Torah study, from "Moses" through the "Prophets,"

[29] "*Hayom Yom*", 23rd of Sivan.

nevertheless, there is a qualitative difference between the preceding levels and the "Men of the Great Assembly." "Moses" and all the other levels through the "Prophets" represent levels of Torah study itself. In contradistinction, the "Men of the Great Assembly" represent the process of introducing Torah into the parameters of the **world**. Moreover, they were able to maintain the integrity of Torah even within the lowliest and most inhospitable aspects of the world—"Heathens were dancing in the Sanctuary"—and demonstrated that; on the contrary, "these are His strengths..." The Men of the great Assembly approach is what finally takes **this** world and transforms it into a dwelling place for G-d.

Now we can understand why the author of the Mishnah consolidated the section of "Moses received the Torah at Sinai," the order of the transmission of Torah with the apparently unrelated section of "And raise up many students." This directive of "raising up many students," is directly related to the accomplishment of the Men of the Great Assembly. When one takes the world that is

characterized as a "public domain," a place that reflects a multitude of influences and directions, and transforms it into a world of unity, the hallmark of the realm of holiness, that is what describes the effects of the Men of the Great Assembly.

This then is what they taught. Take the many, the multifarious and conflicted nature of the world, and raise them up to the realm "students" who are unified by their role as G-d's students. The word for "raise them up" is the original Hebrew '*ha'amidu*" also has the connotation of permanence. With the approach of the Men of the Great Assembly, the temporal world is instilled with a measure of permanence.

What is the connection between the Men of the Great Assembly and the other two directives: "Make a fence for the Torah" and "be deliberate in judgment?"

The approach of the Men of the Great Assembly, as stated is to introduce the Torah within the parameters of the world. When Torah confronts the world, there is a need to erect a fence to protect the integrity of the

Torah. Otherwise the inhospitable nature of the material world can corrupt the integrity and purity of the Torah. This is analogous to the statement of the Talmud[30] about one of the Talmudic Sages who came to a place where Torah observance was lax and instituted new laws to safeguard the existing ones. In the words of the Talmud: "He found an open valley, and he (therefore) erected a fence around it."

Similarly, the directive, "Be deliberate in judgment" is particularly appropriate for times when the Torah study engages the world, such as the period and the mindset of "Men of the Great Assembly." When the world is shrouded in darkness, Torah knowledge—even theoretical knowledge—is hard to come by. As the Talmud states, "Torah cannot be found among those who travel around frequently."[31] When one has to deal with practical applications of Torah, the difficulty is magnified. One of the requirements for rendering decisions of law is

[30] [*Eiruvin* 6a.]

[31] *Eiruvin* 55a and *Rashi*.

to "have a clear mind, as clear as a clear day."[32]

All of the directives of the Men of the Great Assembly were thus especially geared for the time period and mindset that demanded relating the Torah to the exigencies of time.[33]

(Adapted from the talk of *Shabbos Parshas Naso*, 5723)

[32] *Eiruvin* 65a and *Rashi.*

[33] [This does not mean that they advocated changing the Torah, G-d forbid, to suit the demands of their generation. As the Rebbe frequently would cite the language of Hillel (Avos Chapter One, Mishnah) "Love all creatures and bring them close to the Torah." The implication here is that one should bring people close to Torah, not bring the Torah close to them." In this essay, the Rebbe is obviously stating that the Men of the Great Assembly were capable of finding the teachings of Torah that could relate specifically to the needs of their time-period. - Translator's note.]

ESSAY TWO
THE FIVE PREREQUISITES

ESSAY TWO
THE FIVE PREREQUISITES*

I. The Five Questions

The very first Mishnah of *Pirkei Avos* delineates the order of the transmission of the Torah. Moses was the first to have

[*Some of the questions and explanations in this essay are already contained in the preceding essay. Both essays share the premise that the five stages enumerated in the Mishnah are actually five attitudes. However, there are many additional points and explanations in the current one that do not appear in the preceding essay and visa versa. Even those recurrent themes were not deleted for two reasons. The first is stylistic, to ensure the smooth flow of the essay. Second, one can always find nuances of difference even where it seems that the ideas are identical. – Translator's note.]

received the Torah from G-d at Mount Sinai and he, in turn, transmitted it to Joshua. From Joshua it was passed on to the elders, from the elders to the prophets and from the prophets the Torah was passed on to the Men of the Great Assembly.

In the very same Mishnah—after listing the order of transmission of the Torah—three of the central teachings of the Men of the Great Assembly are recorded: "Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many students and make a fence around the Torah."

Mishnah is known for its precision, and *Pirkei Avos* as a part of the Mishnah is no exception to this rule. Every Mishnah deals with one subject, or several facets of the same subject.[34] Rarely does a single Mishnah

[34] The division of the *Mishnayos* is not merely an academic issue, but it relates to practical Halacha as well. *Chelkat Mechokek* (commentary on *Shulchan Aruch, Even Hoezer* 38:40) cites the law regarding marriage that if one were to stipulate that his marriage should take effect on the condition that he is a scholar, the marriage is valid if he has mastered three *Mishnayos.* Accordingly, if one mastered the first Mishnah of *Avos,* despite the fact that it contains two distinct subjects, it would still only

discuss varied subjects. The question thus arises, why does the first Mishnah of *Pirkei Avos* incorporate two disparate themes? First, the Mishnah chronicles the various historical periods in the process of transmitting the teachings of the Torah. And then the Mishnah lists the three ethical teachings of the Men of the Great assembly. Why didn't the author divide these two themes into two separate *Mishnayos*?

A second question that arises is the way the teachings of the Men of the Great Assembly are prefaced: "They said three things." In light of the terse literary style of the Mishnah, one is entitled to ask, why was it necessary to underscore that they said **three** things?[35] To discover the exact number of teachings, all one has to do is simply study these teachings. There is no need for the author to state explicitly that there are three teachings.

---

count as one Mishnah. To qualify as a scholar in this context one would have to master another two *Mishnayos* instead of only one more. See footnote n. 1 in preceding essay.

[35] See *Kiddushin* 2b.

A third question that arises here concerns the order of the three teachings of the Men of the Great Assembly. Of all the three teachings, the one about "raising up many students" should have been the first since it is in harmony with the theme of Torah transmission. After having listed the various stages in the Torah's transition from one period to the next, the Torah finally ended up in the hands of the Men of the Great Assembly. The Mishnah should have stated then that the Men of the Great Assembly made sure that the tradition of Torah would continue by stressing their teaching of raising up new students. Why then does the author insert this pivotal teaching in the center of the three teachings of the Men of the Great Assembly?[36]

[36] Alternatively, considering the Men of the Great Assembly's judicial function, the Mishnah should have commenced with the teaching about being deliberate in judgment, followed by a second judicial imperative to create a fence around the Torah, and only then should it have stated the non-judicial teaching concerning raising up of many students. Either way the three teachings of this Mishnah appear to be out of order.

And fourthly, we must clarify why the Mishnah refers to the Prophets as a link in the chain of Torah transmission. Is it not axiomatic in Halacha that a prophet may not make any decisions of Jewish law based on prophecy.[37] While a prophet can also be a Torah scholar and make decisions of law based on his knowledge of Torah, he may not, however, allow his prophetic status to dictate the law. Why then does the author of this Mishnah highlight the fact that the period between the Elders and the Men of the Great Assembly was the period of the Prophets, when prophecy is totally irrelevant to the process of Torah? Furthermore, among the Men of the Great Assembly were some of the later prophets. Yet, they are not identified as such, but as Men of the Great Assembly. Why then are the Prophets so designated?

One final question. Between the Elders and the Men of the Great Assembly there was indeed a period that is Biblically characterized as the period of the *Shoftim*-Judges. Why is this period not mentioned in this Mishnah?

[37] *Shabbat Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*

II. Two Kinds of Prerequisites

To answer these five questions it is necessary for us to see the five stages of Torah transmission not simply as historical links but as five characteristics that are crucial for proper Torah study.[38] The entire *Avos*—and its study before *Shavuos*—was intended to prepare us for the receiving of the Torah. It is reasonable to believe that the opening Mishnah would provide us with an introduction to the proper mindset needed to approach the Torah.

Proof that these five periods represent five attitudes can be adduced from the fact that only these five generations are mentioned here. If the Mishnah was simply providing us with a chronicle of all the periods between Moses and the Men of the Great Assembly, it would have listed many other generations.[39] It

[38] See preceding essay for a similar discussion.

[39] See *Rambam*' introduction to his *Yad HaChazakah* and introduction to his commentary on the Mishnah (Incorrectly referred to as his introduction to *Zeraim*) for a complete list of all the generations of "*Mikablei HaTorah*-recipients of Torah."

is thus apparent that these five periods were included not (only) for historical purposes, but primarily for didactic purposes. To be worthy of receiving the Torah one must incorporate five characteristics that were possessed and represented by these five periods of Torah transmission.

And while the sixth chapter of *Avos* includes a Mishnah that delineates **forty-eight** steps necessary for the acquisition of Torah, this does not pose a contradiction to the assertion here that the first Mishnah of *Avos* discusses **five** steps. There is a fundamental difference between the Mishnah there and our Mishnah. In chapter six, the objective of the Mishnah is to list the forty-eight types of **behavior** that are prerequisites for the acquisition of Torah knowledge. The opening Mishnah of *Avos*, by contrast, is interested in providing for us the attitudinal prerequisites for Torah study, the proper mindset that is needed for us to receive the Torah.

III. Moses-Humility

Moses was the one who bequeathed the Torah to us, as it is stated: "Moses commanded the Torah to us, an inheritance to the House of Jacob."[40] The implication of this statement is that every one of us is an heir to Moses and all that being an heir entails.[41] According to the legal definition of an heir as one who assumes the role of the person they inherit,[42] it follows that we have all inherited and assumed Moses' identity, particularly with respect to the receiving of the Torah, since it is specifically the Torah that we inherited from him. Granted, these qualities of Moses that we possess are not at all apparent, and we have a long way to go before these qualities of Moses are actualized, nevertheless, they do exist within the hidden

[40] Deuteronomy 33:4.

[41] See *Sanhedrin* 91b.

[42] "In place of your fathers are your children" (Psalms 45:17). See *Tzofnas Pa'aneiach Kelalim*, entry "*Yerushah*."

precincts of our souls and they define who we really are.

To be sure, Moses exhibited many admirable characteristics. He was a liberator, a provider of sustenance, a leader and judge, among other qualities. Which quality of Moses should we emulate or actualize in order to be prepared for the Torah? The answer is that it must be a quality that Moses possessed that is associated with his own relationship with Torah.

Indeed, our Sages cite the verse "Remember the Torah of My servant Moses,"[43] and comment, "Because he sacrificed his life for Torah, it was named after him."

Moses was not only the first link from G-d to us, but Moses who personified humility[44] represents the first prerequisite for Torah study. Indeed, Moses' humility was so intrinsic to his relationship with Torah that our Sages commented: "Because he

[43] *Malachai* 3:22.

[44] *Bamidbar* 12:3: And Moses was the humblest man on the face of the earth."

diminished himself, the Torah was named after him."[45] And when Moses displayed a "reduction" in his state of humility by saying to the Jewish people "And those matters that will be too difficult for you, you shall bring to me,"[46] Moses was punished by forgetting several sections of the Torah.[47] This was not a punishment, but a natural consequence of his reduction of humility. When humility is missing, one loses their capacity to retain Torah.

Humility, as a prerequisite for receiving the Torah is echoed by the Talmud[48] when it discusses the location of the giving of the Torah—on Mount Sinai. "One should always learn from the mindset of his Maker Who did not give the Torah on the majestic mountains but rather on Mount Sinai, the lowest of all the mountains."

---

[45] *Sotah 5a.*

[46] *Devarim* 1:17.

[47] *Sifrei*, ad loc.

[48] *Sotah* 10a.

Moses' trait of humility was so intrinsic to Moses that it is contained in his name. The word *mah*, which means what, is included in Moses name Moshe. Moreover they form the first and last letter of his name.

The obvious lesson for every Jew is that our introduction of Torah depends on humility and self-abnegation. As we say in the concluding prayer of the *Amidah,*

> "And my soul shall be as the dust for everyone,"

followed by

> "Open my heart for Your Torah."

The importance of humility as a prerequisite to Torah study is also expressed in the Talmudic statement[49] that a student must be imbued with a sense of awe as he sits before his teacher of Torah.

Humility and the negation of one's ego is crucial for Torah study because without it one will be unduly influenced by one's personal interests and proclivities. The self-

[49] *Pesachim* 117a.

serving nature of the human being who is not humble will corrupt the integrity of the Torah. One's understanding of Torah will fit into one's very limited, narrow and biased frame of reference.

IV. Joshua-Obsession

Joshua, as his mentor Moses, was a man of many qualities, but the one that is relevant to the reception of Torah is captured in the verse, "He never departed from Moses' tent."[50] Armed with the first characteristic of humility and self-abnegation, one then must develop an unrelenting pursuit of Torah knowledge. With this approach Torah study becomes one's obsession. For Joshua and the Joshua minded student of Torah, there is nothing but the "tent" of Torah.

This prerequisite of Torah applied generally to the entire generation of Jewish people who lived in the desert, as the Midrash states, "The Torah was given only to the eaters of

[50] *Shemos* 33:11.

the Manna."[51] At first glance, this statement is puzzling. Wasn't the Torah given to all Jews?

The answer is that the Midrash is not referring to the people as much as it is referring to the mindset of the people.

To properly be able to receive the Torah one must be like the eaters of the Manna who had absolutely no distractions. All of their needs were taken care of by G-d and were able to devote themselves to Torah study exclusively.

Even the observance of the Mitzvos was a secondary pursuit for that generation because most Mitzvos could not have been observed until they entered into the Promised Land and began the process of plowing, sowing etc.

The most exemplary role model for this obsessive approach to Torah study was Joshua. And the lesson for us is for us to incorporate the obsession for Torah during the times that we allocate for Torah, as if our sole preoccupation was the study of Torah. It is imperative for every Jew to adopt the

[51] *Tanchuma, Beshallach* 20.

Joshua model as a prerequisite to the receiving of the Torah.

V. Elders-Toil

While the Moses-model of humility and the Joshua-model of exclusivity are necessary for the reception of the Torah, one cannot possibly acquire Torah without the involvement of the Elders-model.

To understand the Elders approach to Torah, the Hebrew word for Elders, *Zaken* must be analyzed. The Talmud states[52] that the word *Zaken* is a contraction of the phrase, "*zeh shekanah chochma*-This is the one who acquired wisdom." The key word "acquired" will shed light on the characteristic needed for the reception of the Torah.

There are two modes of acquiring something. One is by way of a gift and the other is through a purchase. The common denominator of these two modes is that they

[52] *Kiddushin* 32b.

both require effort on the part of the recipient. Even a gift for which one does not pay had to have done something nice for the giver for which he is now being compensated. In the words of the Talmud, "If he had not done him some favor, he would not have given him the gift."[53]

There are, however, significant differences between the mode of receiving something by way of a gift or by way of a purchase. First, and most obvious, is that purchasing a gift requires a more tangible and concrete form of payment, not just some amorphous favor. Second, giving a gift does not guarantee that it actually becomes the permanent property of the recipient. One can give a gift on the condition that it is returned after temporary use of the object. That too would qualify as a gift.[54] A purchase, by contrast, is irrevocable.[55] It is the absolute transfer of an object from one person's possession to the

[53] See *Gittin* 50b.

[54] *Kiddushin* 6b. *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim*, 658:4.

[55] See *Bava Metzia* 44a.

other. These two differences between a purchase and a gift are interconnected. Because a purchase demands a significantly greater involvement on the part of the recipient, the degree to which it becomes his is greater as well.

Now we can understand what our Sages meant when they said that an elder, *Zaken* is one who **acquired** wisdom. True acquisition of wisdom requires the maximum degree of effort and toil. One's approach to Torah study cannot be a casual one. Even one who has no other preoccupation other then Torah study—the Joshua mode—they might still apply only minimal effort in the study of Torah. The Elders model of Torah study demands that one invest **all** his energy in the study of Torah.

VI. Prophets-Divine Assistance

With all the prerequisites to Torah study one cannot be guaranteed that they will not err. No matter how much effort and energy one expends, no matter how absolute one's dedication and humility, no person can be

sure that their understanding of Torah is the absolute correct one. For that one must have Divine assistance.

The source of this premise is the discussion in the Talmud concerning King David's virtues.[56] After being told of King David's qualities, King Saul was unimpressed. When it was mentioned, "G-d was with him," King Saul could not deny King David's superiority. What does G-d being with him mean? "The Halacha, the final determination of law, accords with King David's opinions." This impressed Saul because all the other qualities are within our reach by way of our efforts. To really fathom the Halacha, one must have Divine assistance.

VII. Men of the Great Assembly-Practical Application

To become a beneficiary of the Divine assistance in the study of Torah, there is one more prerequisite that is represented by the Men of the Great Assembly. This body of

[56] *Sanhedrin* 93b.

Sages lived at the time of the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel. What distinguished this body of Sages from others was their preoccupation with the practical application of Torah. Ravaged by 70 years of exile, the Jews in exile and those who returned to the Land of Israel faced many challenges. The Men of the Great Assembly addressed the specific needs of the Jewish nation at one of its most trying and challenging times. They are especially known for the enactments that bolstered Jewish life and observance.

The Men of the Great Assembly element in the reception of Torah is thus using and applying Torah knowledge for the exigencies of life. When one knows that the theoretical knowledge of Torah will be used for practical purposes that will affect the lives of other people, it will compel one to delve more deeply into the subject matter so as not to

err. Erring would have a negative impact on others, G-d forbid.[57]

In addition, the very fact that one's Torah study will impact the lives of others is what elicits Divine assistance. There is a well-known story of the famed Rabbi Yechezkel Landau of Prague, known as the *Noda B'Yehudah,* who was given a test as a candidate for this important rabbinic position. Rabbi Landau answered all the questions correctly, with the exception of one question that he got wrong. When confronted about his error, he remarked, "This question must not have been a practical one."

When asked, how he knew this, he replied, "Whenever a rabbi renders a legal decision, he is given special Divine assistance to prevent him from causing harm to others. G-d is "compelled" to provide this assistance, for how can a mere mortal fathom the unfathomable G-dly mind? And since G-d entrusted these matters into the hands of the

[57] See *Bava Basra* 130b: "One does not make a ruling except if it was based on a decision rendered in a real situation." See also *Hemshech* 5666 p. 406.

rabbis, they must have to also be endowed with Divine guidance to not stray from the truth. If, however, a question of Jewish law is only of a theoretical nature, there is no compelling need for G-d to grant special direction. Therefore, the fact that I erred proved that this question was not of a practical nature."

To master the Torah, one must therefore know how to relate the Torah knowledge to the practical aspects of life—the "Men of the Great Assembly-model of Torah reception.

In summary, the five prerequisites for us to receive the Torah Moses-are humility, Joshua-Exclusive dedication to Torah, Elders-Toiling and investing all of one's energies in Torah study, Prophets-Divine assistance and Men of the Great Assembly-Applying Torah to real life circumstances.

VIII. There Are Three Things, Not Two

The Men of the Great Assembly's contribution to the reception of Torah is their ability to see Torah in the applied mode; how Torah relates to and affects the world in

which we live. Thus, the very first thing said about them in our Mishnah is that "they said three things." Even before reading about the three teachings, it is instructive that they said three things; that the number three was highlighted. In the beginning of this essay the question was raised why the need to say that they said three things? In light of the role of the Men of the Great Assembly as sages who applied the Torah to the physical world, we can appreciate the significance of the number three.

Three represents not just the number of their teachings but also the number of things in existence of which we must be aware. They are: G-d, the Giver of the Torah; the person who studies the Torah and the world in which we live towards which the Torah is directed. [58]

[58] The number three is also highlighted in the judicial process. Every case has a plaintiff, defendant and a judge. The minimal composition of a court requires three judges; two would be called "an audacious court." (Sanhedrin 3a. A person consists of three driving forces, the good inclination, the evil

One can—feigning a higher spiritual awareness—claim that there are only two entities, himself and G-d. "Only he and G-d exist and nothing else."[59] While this approach has validity for the theoretical scholar who has yet to apply Torah to the physical world, the student of Torah who has reached the level of practical Halacha, must recognize that there are three entities.

One might think that the three entities are of unequal importance. After all, one might think, does G-d really care about what happens in this world? Does it really mean that much to Him how and what one observes? With an attitude like this, the individual who serves as the guide for the world, likewise feels that he is aloof and dealing with the world is beneath his dignity just as he presumes it must be beneath G-d's dignity, as it were.

To negate this condescending attitude the Mishnah underscores that there are three

---

inclination and the third element that renders the final decision as to a person's behavior.

[59] *Toras Sholom* p. 191.

entities, implying that they are equal. This means that G-d **does** indeed care and takes a keen interest as to what goes on in this world.

Even the way in which a child observes a Mitzvah—whether it is a little boy who wears a juvenile size of garment with *Tzitzis* or a little girl who lights a solitary candle before the onset of Shabbos— G-d does find important. He even is interested in the way a child is educated to do a Mitzvah with beauty and enhanced quality. Even these most apparently insignificant aspects of this world that is governed by Torah are crucial to G-d.

Similarly, we must know that we cannot look down at the world and the teachings of Torah that relate to the world. Realizing the equal importance of the three entities—the Giver of Torah, the recipient of Torah and the application of Torah to the minutest details and nuances of life—is a the first application of the approach of the Men of the Great Assembly to receiving the Torah.

IX. Deliberate in Judgment

From the attitude that relating the Torah to the real world is integral to the entire process of receiving the Torah, one then can appreciate the first of the directives of the Men of the Great Assembly, the Sages who personified this approach, to "be deliberate in judgment."

When one realizes the importance of imparting knowledge to the student, one is careful to consider the needs of the student. Were we to think that the needs of the world are of now real concern to G-d and to the Torah scholar, then a casual, cursory and indifferent approach would suffice in teaching Torah. Proper education requires that the teacher, while disciplining the child, must always give more dominance to the warmth and love he shows the child. As our Sages say, :One should always use the left [i.e., weaker] hand to push away [i.e., discipline] and the right hand [i.e., the stronger and more dominant approach] to bring [the student] close."[60]

[60] *Sotah* 47a.

X. Raise up Many Students

Following the line of thought that the teachings of the Men of the Greta Assembly reflect their function as those whose role is to apply Jewish law to the needs of the world, we can also understand their second teaching of "Raising up many students."

Our Sages of the Midrash state: "A thousand [students] enter for the study of Scripture and a hundred emerge; a hundred [of them enter for the study of] Mishnah; ten of them emerge; ten [of them enter for the study of] Gemara and one emerges [qualified] for practical instruction."[61] In other words, only one out of a thousand will actually be qualified to apply the Torah's teachings to the issues that confront society.[62]

If so, one might argue from the vantage point of the Men of the Great Assembly, why bother to educate the thousand students,

[61] *Vayikra Rabbah* 2:1 and *Matnos Kehunah* ad loc.

[62] See commentary *Yefei Toar* that explains the words of the Midrash as a suggestion that out of the total number of a thousand students only one will emerge qualified for practical instruction.

when one knows that only one will realize the goal of the men of the Great Assembly—practical application of the Torah? Why not seek out the one student with the potential and aptitude for practical Halacha and devote all of our attention to him?

To allay this thought, the Men of the Great Assembly stated emphatically that, on the contrary, "Raise up **many** students!" In order to get the one for practical application of the Torah one must first produce the ten who are qualified for the theoretical knowledge of Gemara. To produce those ten, one must first have a hundred students who study Mishnah and to obtain those hundred, one must first have a thousand students who are qualified for the study of Scripture.

The Men of the Great Assembly are thus instructing us to increase the number of students so that eventually we will produce the few select teachers of Jewry who will be equipped to deal with the day-to-day issues that confront society.

XI. Make a Fence Around the Torah

After being told how careful we have to be in providing the student with his needs by judging deliberately the student's level and catering to his needs, and after being told that we cannot limit the number of students we include, one might have thought that we should provide the student with his heart's desires. By doing so we will make it easier to attract more students and to develop a positive and warm relationship with the student.

To dispel any such notion—that by relaxing standards we will succeed in raising qualified students—the Men of the Great Assembly conclude their three teachings with the admonition, "Make a fence around the Torah." The simple meaning of this statement is that we must constantly look for ways to buttress and reinforce that which the Torah restricts. Even those things that might not be inherently wrong and forbidden by the Torah, one should still shun. As the *Ramban*[63] explains how "one can become a degenerate

[63] Commentary on Torah, Leviticus 19:2.

[even] with the license of Torah." This means that if one does not seek ways of strengthening one's moral fiber by becoming even more disciplined than the Torah demands, one can degenerate.

So while the Men of the Great Assembly advocate relating with positive energy to as many students as possible, this does not suggest that we should loosen our standards and use permissiveness as a way of reaching the students. The only way we can cultivate many responsible students who will become the guides for the next generation is to maintain the highest standards without sacrificing our acceptance of and dedication to the largest number of students.

(Adapted from the talk of Shabbos Parshas Naso, 5736)

ESSAY THREE: AVOS ACCORDING TO PARDES

ESSAY THREE: AVOS ACCORDING TO PARDES

1. The Emphasis on Sinai

Avos begins with an enumeration of the pivotal periods of Torah transmission. Moses received the Torah at Sinai and from there it was passed on to subsequent periods until it reached the Men of the Great Assembly, whose ethical teachings are the first to be mentioned in this treatise. The purpose of this chronology is to underscore how all of Judaism, including the ethical teachings, was handed down to us by G-d.[64]

[64] See *Bartenura*.

The first question that arises is why the author did not mention this fundamental description of how the Torah came from G-d and was transmitted to us through Moses and subsequent leaders in an earlier Tractate? Why doesn't the first Mishnah—in tractate *Berachos*—feature this order of transmission so that we will know that the teachings of the entire Mishnah originated at Sinai?

Indeed, Maimonides did precisely that in his introduction to his Mishneh Torah, a compendium of all of Jewish law. His introduction is devoted to a detailed description of how the Torah came from G-d at Sinai and was transmitted to us via Moses, and all of the subsequent links in the chain of tradition. Why didn't Rabbi *Yehudah HaNasi*, the redactor of the Mishnah, do the same and preface the order of transmission before the first laws of the first Mishnah?

A second question that arises is the syntax of the first sentence: Moses received the Torah at Sinai." The focus of this Mishnah is Torah, not Moses. The word Torah should, therefore, have been the subject of the sentence and it should have stated: "The Torah was received

by Moses at Sinai." Why does it have Moses as the subject?

A third question relates to the phrase "from Sinai." Commentators explain that it means "from G-d who was revealed at Sinai." If so, the question can be asked, why did the Mishnah have to rely on an inference? Why didn't the Mishnah simply state that Moses received the Torah from G-d?

II. The "P'shat" Of Sinai

Torah can be understood on four levels. *P'shat* (the straightforward and surface meaning) *Remez* (interpretations based on hints and allusions, or allegorical interpretations) *Drush* (the homiletic approach, where the meaning of a text is discovered after probing beneath the surface to discover its underlying meaning, and *Sod* (the esoteric and mystical approach, where the text alludes to the mystical teachings of Kabbalah).[65]

[65] [These four methods are often represented by the acronym *Pardes*, which literally means orchard. To

With regard to tour Mishnah, too, there can be four ways of understanding the emphasis on the word "Sinai."

The straightforward meaning of the emphasis on the word Sinai in the sentence, "Moses received the Torah from **Sinai**" is to highlight the special circumstances that surrounded the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai that provides us with a proper understanding as to how we should approach Torah. The giving of the Torah on Sinai was accompanied with thunder and lightning.[66] It

---

better understand the four levels we can make use of a series of analogies, with respect to how one can define the earth. To the farmer, who sees things straightforwardly, as they appear on the surface, it is the source of vegetation—*P'shat*. To the archeologist, who looks for relics in the ground, the earth is what contains hints about life in the distant past—*Remez*. To the geologist, who analyzes the composition of the earth, often digging much deeper than the farmer of archeologist, the earth is the repository of many minerals and rich resources—*Drush.* To the treasure hunter, the earth contains secret treasures that were put there by its owner that can be found only by its owner or one who has been given a treasure map—*Sod*.]

[66] Exodus 19:16.

was an awesome experience, one that generated great reverence and trepidation.[67]

From this very image that the mention of Sinai conjures we can derive a lesson that our Torah study today must be one that reflects the awesomeness of the Sinai experience. One must be cognizant of the Divine source and revelation of Torah that occurred at Sinai. This awareness that precedes our study of Torah, will evoke a feeling of humility and self-effacement.[68] All this is the obvious symbolism of the word Sinai.

III. The "Remez" of Sinai

From the vantage point of Remez, the emphasis on the giving of the Torah on Sinai is to underscore the uniqueness of the Torah that was given on Sinai. Despite the fact that several of the commandments had already been given previously in places such as Marah or Refidim, nevertheless, these very same commandments were transmitted to

[67] Ibid.

[68] *Sifsosav notfos mor*

Moses once more at Sinai. Sinai revolutionized all of the Mitzvos that were given previously.

All this is hinted in the word "*Umesoroh*-And he passed it on" which consists of the four letters, *mem, samach, reish* and *hei*. These four letters are said to be an acronym for the four words, *Marah, Sinai, Refidim* and *Har*, a reference to the various locations where G-d communicated some of His Mitzvos to the Jewish people.[69] All of them were reiterated at Sinai.

This lesson hinted in the Mishnah conveys a matter of Halacha as to the way we ought to view the observance of all Mitzvos and echoes the words of Maimonides:[70] "All of that which we avoid doing or do today, we do not do it save for the fact that it is G-d's commandment [given to us] through Moses our Teacher, peace be unto him, and not because it was said to the prophets who

[69] See *Sanhedrin* 56b; *Ramban*, Exodus, end of *Beshallach.*

[70] Commentary on the Mishnah, *Chullin,* end of chapter 7.

preceded him." This can be extended to include even the Mitzvos that were given through Moses before Sinai. We observe them not because they were given to us in those places, but because they were given at Sinai.[71] The revelation at Sinai represents the ultimate source for G-d's directives to us.

The "Drush" of Sinai

From the vantage point of *Drush*, Sinai symbolizes the mountain characteristic that one must possess when one studies Torah. One must be imbued with a sense of firmness and certitude—like a mountain—

[71] Despite the fact that Maimonides only mentions the commandments of *Ever min Hachai* (a limb torn from a living animal), Circumcision, and *Gid Hanashe* (the prohibition against eating the sciatic nerve), and he does not mention those commandments that were given at *Marah* etc., nevertheless we are compelled to conclude that he includes those Mitzvos as well. The proof is that Maimonides words are based on the wording of the Mishnah that says, "it was said on Sinai." Second, Maimonides concludes, "Do you not see that our Sages said, '613 Mitzvos were said to Moses from Sinai."

when one approaches Torah study. Without this approach, one can be daunted by the prospects of engaging in the study of G-d's Torah. The evil impulse could very easily attempt to deter us from Torah study by saying, "What right do you have to learn Torah, considering the Divine nature of Torah?" One must be armed with strength and pride to not be affected by this argument.

Coupled with the lesson of pride and confidence that is symbolized by the fact that G-d gave the Torah on a mountain,[72] one must also possess the paradoxical characteristic of humility that is represented by the fact that Sinai was lowest of all mountains.[73]

The "Sod" of Sinai

From the perspective of *Sod,* the significance of Sinai is that it has the same numerical

[72] See *Sotah* that a Torah Scholar must have an "eighth of an eighth" of pride.

[73] *Midrash Tehllim* (Buber edition) 68:17.

value of 130. This number is significant because it is five times the numerical value of the Divine name, the Tetragrammaton, which is numerically 26 (5x26=130).[74] The significance of this numerical equivalency is that at the time of the revelation at Sinai, five Divine forces were revealed, as the Talmud[75] states that "the Torah was given with five sounds." The term "sounds" is expressive of the concept of communication. And the fact that the Torah was given with **five** sounds suggests that five levels of Torah—that correspond to the numerical value of the word Sinai, 130, which is five times the numerical value of G-d's name—were communicated to the world at Sinai.

The significance of having **five** aspects of Torah communicated is related to the fact that the entire framework of existence—including the spiritual realms—consists of four general levels. The four conventional levels of Torah thus relate to the four "normative" levels of existence.

---

[74] *Kehillas Yaakov,* on the entry Sinai.

[75] *Berachos* 6b.

The fifth level of Torah is not just one more level; it is the very essence of Torah that transcends all of existence.

When it is said that at Sinai all five levels were revealed it means that the fifth, transcendent and essential level of Torah was communicated **together** with the four conventional levels of Torah. All these four levels were, in effect, influenced by the fifth level of Torah, which is its essence.

The lesson from this mystical understanding of the word Sinai is that our souls comprise four levels or faculties. They are referred to as *Nefesh, Ruach, Neshomo and Chaya*. These four names reflect the soul's capacity to motivate us to action (*Nefesh)*, arouse our feelings (*Ruach*), activate our intellectual powers (*Neshomo)* and stimulate our will power (*Chaya*). Each one of the four levels of Torah relates to its corresponding level of the soul and serves to activate it and actualize its potential.

There is, however, a fifth level of the soul that is called *Yechidah.* This level represents the essence of the soul that does not

normally find its expression within the other of the soul's activities.

However, at Sinai, even the fifth level of the soul was moved and revealed together with the other four levels of the soul, because even the fifth level of Torah, its essence was communicated.

Moreover, it was not revealed by itself, but it was revealed together with the other four levels of Torah. This translated into a process that all the faculties of the soul—even the most prosaic—was influenced and affected by the soul's very essence, its *Yechidah.* [76]

[76] [In the original transcript, the answer to the first two questions is missing. Perhaps, in light of the Rebbe's analysis above, we could see how these questions can be resolved. The first question as to why the order of transmission is not mentioned earlier in the Mishnah is resolved, because the intention of the author of this Mishnah is not historical. Rather, the author intended to highlight the preeminence of Torah that it was given at Sinai, which serves to teach some very special things about Torah, according to all levels of Torah interpretation. This preface is not germane to other parts of the Mishnah, but it is relevant here in *Avos*, where the focus throughout the Tractate is the virtue of Torah.

(Adapted from the talk of *Shabbos Parshas Shemini*, 5731)

This enables us to dispatch with the second question, which is why he doesn't start with the word Torah, instead it begins with Moses receiving the torah at Sinai. Indeed, the focus of this Mishnah is not to describe the chronology of Torah, but to define the greatness of Torah by Moses receiving of it at Sinai,]

ESSAY FOUR
JOINING OPPOSITES

ESSAY FOUR
JOINING OPPOSITES

1. Order of Transmission

When the author of the first Mishnah in *Avos* describes the order of Torah's transmission it states: Moses received the Torah from Sinai." Why, commentators ask, was it necessary to stress that Moses received the Torah and that he received it at Sinai? Wouldn't it have been more appropriate for the Mishnah to state, "G-d gave the Torah?" Why stress that it was received by Moses and that it was given at Sinai? This question is particularly strong in light of the fact that G-d is everywhere, not just at Sinai.

The answer lies in a better understanding of why G-d selected Mount Sinai as the location for *Mattan Torah*, the Giving of the Torah.

According to the Midrash[77] all of the mountains vied for the privilege to be the mountain for the giving of the Torah. Mount Tabor complained that it was the best suited for it was the highest mountain. Mount Carmel that it was better qualified because it assisted in the splitting of the Reed Sea. G-d's response to these mountains was that their arrogance was actually what disqualified them. Only Mount Sinai that was the lowest of all mountains was worthy of being the mountain upon which the torah would be given.

This Midrashic explanation however begs the obvious question. If "lowness" is a quality, the Torah should have been given in a valley, at least on level ground. Why give it on any mountain? And if the characteristic of a mountain is desirable why not give it on a higher mountain?

The answer to this anomaly lies in the very purpose of the giving of the Torah to synthesize two diametrically opposed entities,

[77] *Midrash Tehillim* 68"17 (Buber edition). See also *Megillah* 29a.

the physical and the spiritual, "lowness" and "highness" together. Torah's objective thus is to take the physical and transform it into something spiritual. And this process is hinted in the paradox of giving the Torah on the lowest of Mountains, the high and low combined.

We can now appreciate why the Mishnah emphasizes that the Torah was given at Sinai. By stressing the role of Sinai—the fusing of high (spiritual) and low (physical)—it helps us understand what the significance of the revelation at Sinai had.

Even before Sinai there were Mitzvos. What was so novel about the idea that G-d was commanding them to do Mitzvos? True, the Patriarchs performance of the Mitzvos was optional, but there were also the Seven Noahide Commandments that were given as commandments to the entire human race and several commandments that were given shortly before Sinai in *Marah*? What—besides the quantitative increase in the number of Mitzvos—did Sinai accomplish?

To answer this question, we must refer to the Midrash[78] that describes the difference between pre-Sinai existence and post-Sinai existence. Before Sinai there was a "decree" or partition that heaven and earth shall never meet. The verse, "The heaven's are the heavens for G-d and the earth was given to humans,"[79] was meant quite literally that the two realms couldn't possibly meet. That is until Sinai, when all that changed for good. The novel thing about Sinai was that it effected a complete synthesis between the physical and the spiritual.

Hence, the Torah was given at Sinai, to underscore that conceptually, *Mattan Torah* was about unifying two opposite entities.

If one were to argue how can one unite two opposites, the answer is Sinai. We were empowered by Sinai. If an inanimate object, the lowliest of all of creation, can unify opposites, how much more so, can a human being, the highest of all classes, accomplish

[78] *Shemos Rabbah* 12:3.

[79] Psalms 115:16.

this goal of making this "lowly" physical world a "dwelling-place" for G-d.

II. Humility and Pride

One can take the concept of synthesizing the two opposite entities of the physical and spiritual represented by the model of Sinai and apply it to the two opposite attitudes of pride and humility and their unification in the study of Torah and observance of the Mitzvos.

Several messages can be conveyed by this fusion:

First, to receive the Torah, two conditions are necessary: On the one hand one must possess assertiveness and pride, so as not to be deterred by the mockers. Indeed, the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law) begins with the admonition not to be deterred by anyone who might try to cool down one ardor for the study of Torah and the observance of the Mitzvos.

On the other hand, one must be self-effacing and humble. Arrogance and an inflated ego are a contradiction to having a relationship with G-d. As the Talmud states that G-d says concerning an arrogant person, "I and he cannot live together."[80] To be receptive to Torah one must have humility. "My soul shall be as dust for all, open my heart in your Torah and Mitzvos."[81] First one must be like the dust of the earth, only then can one's heart can be opened to receive the Torah.

While it might seem that these two traits are mutually exclusive, in truth they can be complementary. One's assertiveness in this case is not because of his ego. On the contrary, this individual knows very well what his shortcomings are. He even feels that everyone else is superior to him. He epitomizes the characteristic of Sinai—**lowest** of all the mountains. Despite all this, this person possesses the strength and firmness when it comes to doing Torah and Mitzvos because he is about to do

[80] *Sotah* 5a.

[81] Prayer following the *Amidah*.

G-d's will. His devotion to and obsession with the fulfillment of G-d's will so energizes him to do things with the greatest of force and determination. All obstacles just fade away.

This individual epitomizes the synthesis between utter humility on one side and pride and firmness on the other side.

A second and more profound lesson can be derived from the story of the mountains. The very fact that the other mountains approached G-d with the argument that their height warranted that the Torah be given on them proves that being a mountain is a virtue.

If the mountain is purely a metaphor for a vacuous ego, these mountains would certainly not have entertained the thought that they should be the mountains selected for the giving of the Torah. "Torah will not be found among the ones with the inflated egos."[82] We are compelled to say that there is a virtue in being a mountain.

[82] *Eiruvin* 55a.

Indeed, in Chassidic literature a mountain represents the inanimate world as it rises to a higher level and is defined as the "vegetative aspect of the inanimate world."[83] The mountain metaphor is therefore a positive one, representing the more refined and elevated individual.

However, notwithstanding the positive status of a high mountain, the mountain individual must be utterly self-effacing and humble.

There are certain individuals who are spiritually wealthy[84] because they possess much knowledge. Even this "wealthy" individual needs to preface "my soul shall be as dust for all" before "Open my heart for your Torah and commandments." Even while he knows his wealth he must also be sincerely and genuinely humble.

This idea that even when a person knows his superior qualities he can and must still be

[83] See *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5704, p. 214.

[84] See *Nedarim* 41a: "There is no poor person except in knowledge." By extension it follows that there is no truly rich person except one who is rich in knowledge.

humble derives from Moses. Moses is described by the Torah, "The man Moses is the most humble man on the face of the earth."[85] Although Moses was well aware of his qualities, that he was the one through whom the Torah was given, nevertheless he regarded himself lower than all the people on the face of the earth, even lower than the lowliest generation referred to as "the heels of Moshiach." Knowing his own qualities was not a contradiction to his humility because he reckoned that his qualities were a gift that came from G-d. If some other individual had been endowed with the same talents and qualities, they would have surpassed Moses.

Because of his humility and total self-abnegation, feeling absolutely no sense of aloofness or condescension, notwithstanding his incredible virtue of which he was aware, Moses was therefore the proper instrument through whom the Torah was given.

[85] Numbers 12:3.

We can now answer the first question as to why the Mishnah stresses that Moses received the Torah at Sinai.

By emphasizing Moses' role we can derive the same lesson as the emphasis that the Torah was given at Sinai. Every Jew has the capacity to actualize the spark of Moses, the Moses potential that exists within each and every one of us.[86] When this spark is ignited one can internalize Moses' characteristics n both levels that e=were discussed earlier.

First, one can synthesize the two diametrically opposite characteristics of assertiveness and humility. Moses was the very embodiment of these two traits inasmuch as Moses as a king, as it says: "And there was a king in Jeshurun,"[87] referring to Moses.[88] But simultaneously, Moses was also the most humble self-effacing person.

[86] See *Tanya,* chapter 42 and beginning of chapter 44.

[87] Deuteronomy 33:5.

[88] See *Likkutei Torah, Devarim* 45a.

And second, one must possess both the quality of humility even as one knows their own virtues. Both of these paradoxical combinations were exhibited by Moses and are accessible to us by virtue of the Moses quality that is embedded in our soul..

By studying *Pirkei Avos* before the Festival of *Shavuos*, the anniversary of the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, we prepare ourselves to receive the Torah anew. Our very first preparation is the need to incorporate the characteristics of Moses and Sinai. This enables us to receive the Torah with joy and to internalize its teachings.

(Adapted from the talks of Shabbos Parsha Behar 5718 and Shabbos Mevorchim of the month of Iyar, 5716-printed in Likkutei Sichos, vol. 1, p. 276-279.)

ESSAY FIVE

ONE RECIPIENT

ESSAY FIVE

ONE RECIPIENT

1.

> "Moses received the Torah at Sinai and passed it on to Joshua and Joshua to the elders..."

With these opening words, Avos describes the way Torah was transmitted from G-d to Moses and from Moses to subsequent generations until it reached the period known as the "Men of the Great Assembly."

There is an interesting fact that emerges from this description that requires clarification. G-d transmitted the Torah to just one individual—Moses. The question that arises is why was there only one recipient? This problem with transmitting the Torah to just one individual is magnified in

light of the Rashi's commentary on the words, "And He gave it to Moses when he concluded speaking to him." [89] Rashi makes the observation that the word for conclude in Hebrew "*kichaloso*" is written without a *vov*, as if it was "*k'chalso*" as his bride, This is to teach us that G-d gave Moses the Torah as a gift that a bride gives to the groom. Why did G-d have to give him the Torah as a gift? Rashi explains because he could not master all of it in such a small period of time.

Now if Moses had a hard time receiving the Torah that necessitated G-d giving it to him as a gift, why didn't G-d simply give the Torah to several people? Each one of them could have mastered one part. Why the emphasis on one recipient?

With respect to the first recipient, Moses, one could say that his selection was to emphasize the theme of unity. Just as there is one G-d and one Torah, so too, there was only one recipient. More than one initial recipient could have led to a mistake similar to what was caused when G-d said "Let **us** make

[89] Exodus 31:18.

man."[90] Multiple recipients could have given some the impression that there were, G-d forbid, more than one Divine source from which these teachings came. This will explain why throughout many of the subsequent generations, there was more than one recipient of the Torah. Indeed, in this very chapter we read of the *zugos*, the pairs who received and transmitted the Torah from one generation to the next.[91] Likewise the Rambam, when discussing the forty generations from Moses through the redaction of the Talmud, he describes many of the links as Rabbi so and so "and his court,"[92] implying that there were actually more than one recipient even when one name is mentioned.

The question remains, however, with regard to subsequent generations where there were

[90] See *Bereishis Rabbah* 8:8. *Yalkut Shimoni, Bereishis remez* 13. *Rashi, Bereishis* 1:26.

[91] From *Yosei ben Yoezer* and *Yosei ben Tzereidah* in Mishnah 4 through *Hillel* and *Shammai*.

[92] Introduction to *Mishneh Torah*.

single recipients.[93] By transmitting the torah to only one recipient would no longer help to reinforce the theme of unity, because there were multiple recipients in earlier generations. Why then was there such an emphasis on finding one individual to whom the Torah should be transmitted? If transmitting all of the Torah to Moses was fraught with difficulty, wouldn't it have been preferable to pass on the tradition to multiple recipients?

II.

The answer to this question requires a better understanding of what precisely the teachers transmitted to the next generation and what being a recipient entailed.

[93] Although the Rambam writes in his introduction to the Mishneh Torah, "Elazar, Pinchas and Joshua, all three received it from Moses," however he concludes "and to Joshua he passed on the Oral Torah and commanded him concerning it." Our Mishnah too states clearly "and he passed it on to Joshua."

Torah study consists of two distinct focuses.[94] First, there is an obligation to learn and know the entire Torah. This obligation requires that one know the reasons for the laws in a succinct fashion. This means that one must know the reasons for all of the 613 commandments, with all of their minute details and nuances, as well as the rabbinical laws. As extensive and as broad a scope as this obligation is, it is finite. One can master all of the laws with their basic explanations

There is also a second obligation that devolves on a person even if he has mastered the entire Torah. It is for one to devote time for "delving into the Talmud, to understand the conceptual basis for the laws, to engage in dialectical casuistry, to raise questions, provide answers and thereby fathom the profundities of the concepts and reasons for the laws and to be capable of drawing logical inferences from them." This area of study truly has no limit. No matter how deep one

[94] See *Alter Rebbes's Shulchan Aruch, Hilchos Talmud Torah* chapter 1:4-5. Chapter 2:1-2. Beginning of chapter three. See there for cross-references.

can go in attempting to understand the meaning of the Torah, there is always a level that is deeper and that is ultimately unfathomable.

There is a practical application that emerges from these two facets of Torah study. One who wants to postpone marriage in order to study may do so. However, this license is only granted to one who wishes to master the entire Oral Torah with but succinct explanations. This is a feat that is possible to accomplish by the age of twenty.[95] By contrast, one may not postpone marriage in order to fulfill his obligation to engage in the in-depth Torah study because it really has no limit.

Now, with respect to the transmission of the Torah from one generation to the next, the Alter Rebbe writes:

> "Just as they received the *Mishnayos* and *Beraitos* one man from the other, so too

[95] This goes against the opinion of the *Rosh.* See *Hilchos Talmud Torah* ad loc., beginning of Chapter three. See *Kuntres Acharon* there for a lengthy treatment of this issue.

they received the reasons for each law, without the *pilpul*, the dialectical analysis of the laws. This can be deduced from the statement of the Talmud[96] that pilpul was only given to Moses and his children. Therefore, even in those times they were not conscientious about remembering the pilpul and they did not review it sufficiently; they remembered just the laws with brief explanations. Because they did not adequately review the *pilpul,* all the *pilpul* of the *Tanaim* and the early *Amoraim* was forgotten. The Talmud cites only a small fraction of it. Evidence of the dearth of pilpul that existed can be found in the second chapter of Shabbos[97] that he would answer every one of R. *Pinchas ben Yair*'s question with twenty-four answers. Yet, we do not find this ever occurring in the entire Talmud. Similarly, *Resh Lakish* would ask twenty-four questions on each statement of *R.*

[96] *Nedarim* 38

[97] 33, end of side b.

> *Yochanan*.[98] Yet we do not find any place in the Talmud where he asks more than seven or eight questions. There is never a place where his twenty-four questions are recorded. All the rest were forgotten, because there was no obligation to review them, since pilpul was given only to Moses."[99]

We can now understand why there was a possibility and even a preference for one

[98] *Bava Metzia* 84, end of side a.

[99] A story is told about the *Ragatchover Gaon* (R. *Yoseph* Rosen, one of the greatest Talmudists of the twentieth century) who was once asked about the number of questions that were asked on a statement of *R. Yochanan*. He answered that there were seven. When the questioner argued that the Alter Rebbe stated that there were seven or eight, he reflected for some time and said that "yes, there was one more time, but it hinged on a dispute or a variant reading of the text." He then expressed his amazement of the Alter Rebbe's erudition and praised him profusely.

The *Ragatchover* had previously expressed profound admiration for the *Alter Rebbe*'s brilliance; in the way he clarified complex issues with merely adding one word. Alas, who today would search to find the foregoing "seven and eight times," recorded in the Talmud?

recipient of Torah in each of the generations. Were the transmitters of Torah interested in imparting the intricacies and complexities of the *pilpul* component of Torah to the next generation, the sheer volume and intricacy of information would have necessitated multiple teachers and recipients. When it comes to one who follows the approach of *pilpul*, sometimes referred to as an "uprooter of mountains,"[100] it is the give-an-take of multiple individuals[101] that contributes to the process. Our Sages were referring to this when they said:[102] "What is the meaning of the verse, 'A sword to the …'[103] a sword on the enemies of Sages who engage in Torah solitarily. Moreover, they will also become foolish." Pilpul study demands peer involvement and review.

---

[100] End of *Berachos* and *Horiyos*

[101] See *Avos,* 6:6, where it lists the following among the 48 ways to acquire Torah knowledge: "companionship with one's contemporaries and discussion and debate with one's students."

[102] *Berachos* 63b.

[103] Jeremiah 50:36.

With regard to the transmission of the laws with only brief explanations—an approach that is identified as "Sinai"[104] because "the *Mishnayos* and *Beraisos* were so neatly arranged for him, just as they were given at Sinai,"[105]—the reverse is true. There is a distinct advantage when it is transmitted to only one recipient. Were there to be two recipients, it is likely that a dispute will raise between them, as did occur with *Shammai* and *Hillel*—who were genuine recipients—and who both received the tradition from *Shemaya* and *Avtalyon*. And notwithstanding whom they both received the Torah from, they still differed because of the Talmudic dictum, "there are no two people who think alike."[106]

Thus, whichever generation was capable of having but one teacher pass the Torah one to but one recipient, this was the most preferable way for the Torah to be

[104] See n. 99.

[105] Rashi ad loc.

[106] See *Berachos* 58a. *Sanhedrin* 38a. See there for cross-references.

transmitted accurately. If, for whatever reason, this were not possible, it would then be transmitted to two students or more. Hence when the opportunity arose they restored the tradition to one recipient. [107]

---

[107] Notwithstanding the emphasis of the straightforward transmission of the laws with brief explanations from one generation to the next, it does not diminish, G-d forbid, the importance of the pilpul give-an-take dialectical approach of Torah ("probing the depths of the laws and the dialectical exchange therein"), particularly considering that this methodology leads to the innovation of new laws. See *Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch, Hilchos Talmud Torah*, 1:5, 2:2.

The significance and desirability of the pilpul approach is further magnified when we realize how our connection to Moses is primarily through this approach, since pilpul was given as a gift specifically to him. Moses was magnanimous and gave it to Israel. Whereas the rest of the Torah was given **through** Moses who received it at Sinai, that was not Moses' contribution. *Pilpul*, by contrast is identified with Moses in particular—for which reason he is called *Rabeinu*-**our** teacher.

These two approaches are generally represented by the titles "*Sinai*" and "uprooter of mountains." Alternatively they are represented by the terms "deliberate and focused" and "sharp and [always]

(*Adapted from the talk of Shabbos Parshas Naso, 5745)*

challenging." (*Horiyos* ibid.), or: "A cemented cistern that does not lose a drop," and "a gushing fountain." These two approaches generally reflect the diverse roles of the *Rav* and the *Rosh Yeshiva*. Both approaches are complementary and one should dedicate times for the study of "straight" *Halacha* as well as times for study of Torah utilizing the *pilpul* approach.

ESSAY SIX
A LESSON FOR RABBIS

ESSAY SIX

A LESSON FOR RABBIS

1.

On the opening words of Avos, "Moses received the Torah from Sinai," there is a well-known question. Why does it describe Moses' role as the recipient rather than G-d's role as the giver of the Torah? It could have said, "G-d gave the Torah to Moses..."

If, for whatever reason, the author preferred describing the process of Torah transmission from the vantage point of the recipient, it still should have phrased it differently. Instead of "Moses received the Torah from **Sinai,"** it should have said, "Moses received the Torah from G-d." Why emphasize **Sinai**?

Commentators explain that Sinai, the lowest of the mountains, symbolizes the trait of

humility that serves as a prerequisite to Torah study. This idea echoes our prayer "And my soul shall be like the dust for all."[108]

However, this explanation does not suffice. Humility is not the only prerequisite for Torah study. Comprehension, for example, is indispensable for Torah study. Torah, as an intellectual discipline[109] cannot be accessed without engaging the intellect. Equally important for mastery of Torah are effort and toil.[110] And, arguably, these two prerequisites are more relevant and necessary for Torah study than humility. Without comprehension, it is not Torah study at all. And without expending effort one cannot possible master the Torah. Conversely, while humility is crucial, even an arrogant person is duty bound to study Torah. Violating one Mitzvah does not grant one the license to violate another. As the Talmud puts it: "If one were

[108] See earlier essays where this theme is elaborated on at great length.

[109] "For it is your wisdom and understanding." (Deuteronomy 4:6).

[110] *Megillah* 6b.

to eat garlic from whom a foul odor emanates, should he eat more garlic to emanate a foul odor?"[111] On the contrary, one who is arrogant needs Torah study even more to help reduce his arrogance.

Why then, does the Mishnah commence with a reference to Sinai, to underscore the importance of humility, when the two must indispensable and intrinsic prerequisites for Torah study—comprehension and effort—are not addressed here?

II.

From the very first directives mentioned in the first Mishnah, such as "Be deliberate in **judgment**," "Raise up many **students**," it is evident that the Mishnah is directed to teachers, judges and heads of Yeshivas. For this segment of the population, there is obviously no need to advocate comprehension and effort in Torah study, since they have already reached that milestone Otherwise, they could not have become judges etc.

[111] *Berachos* 51a. *Shabbos* 31b.

For these intellectual elite the first pertinent lesson is, therefore humility, encapsulated in the words "Moses received the Torah from Sinai." A Torah scholar, a rabbi and a judge must be able to assert their authority. They must be firm and regal in their demeanor.[112] A judge is enjoined by the Torah to, "not fear any person."[113] This strength is needed in order to ensure the Torah directives are implemented. They cannot afford to be influenced or intimidated by anyone.

And since these individuals must project a tough and assertive demeanor, they need extra special protection not to lose their humility and self-effacement.

We can now explain why the Mishnah says, "Moses received the Torah **from** Sinai" rather than "**at** Sinai." Mount Sinai epitomized the lesson for Moses and all subsequent leaders and teachers of Torah. Moses received the moral instruction **from** Sinai itself. After G-d had bestowed the singular honor of

[112] "Who are the kings? The Rabbis." (See *Gittin* 62a. Zohar III, 253b.

[113] Deuteronomy 1:17.

descending onto Mount Sinai[114] and giving the Torah upon her, it remained the "lowest of all the mountains." Sinai was not elevated.

Not only was Sinai the mountain of choice because it was the lowest and humblest of all the mountains prior to the giving of the Torah, but, moreover, even **after** G-d selected Sinai and gave the Torah on its peaks, it did not alter its sense of humility; it remained "the lowest of all the mountains."

And it was this phenomenon—that Sinai did not become elevated even after it was the mountain upon which G-d descended and gave the Torah—that guided Moses. Moses, despite all of his greatness and virtue, would remain "the most humble man on the face of the earth," because of what he learned from Sinai.

Thus, the very first lesson for judges, Roshei Yeshivos (heads of higher academies of learning) and the like is that they must combine their sense of authority and assertiveness in matters of Torah and Mitzvos

[114] Exodus 19:20.

with humility and self-effacement—just like Sinai.

Not only will this spirit of self-effacement not compromise their authority, it will enhance it. Without humility, one could easily suspect that the tough stance that a rabbi takes is self-serving and for ulterior motives. How could the judge or rabbi be confident that his ruling represents the objective and unadulterated truth of Torah? After all even they are human and all humans are fallible.[115] However, when one is self-effacing, he has no separate identity other than Torah. It is thus clear to all that the aura of authority he exudes emanates from Torah and not an expression of some personal agenda.

III.

This theme of duality—assertiveness on the one hand and humility on the other hand—is a theme that runs through the

[115] Even Moses erred when he was angered (Sifri, cited by Rashi, Numbers 31:21).

continuation of the Mishnah: "Raise up many students."

The Hebrew term for many is undefined as to how many students one should teach. The message this conveys is that there is no limit. No matter how many students one already has, one must seek to increase their number. Whoever exhibits some potential to become your student, the Mishnah exhorts you to take him under your wing and grow your pool of students.

To facilitate this expansion of students, one must possess a healthy sense of self-esteem and confidence. Without this assertive nature, one would not be driven to bring yet one more student into his sphere of influence.

Yet, the very same message of "raising **many** students," demands that one accept not only as large a number of students that are available, but it also dictates that one should accept any type of student, even one who, qualitatively speaking, lacks the assets and strengths that would enhance the teacher's position. On the contrary, the student seems to be on a very low level.

To accept a student of that caliber one must be imbued with a spirit of humility. If one were to deny access to this student on the grounds that he is not qualified to be a student, one could always challenge that conclusion and argue that it was the teacher's personal ego that did not want to have an inferior student. Acceptance of every student—implied by the words "Raise **many** students"—is a clear demonstration that the teacher has inculcated the lesson of Sinai in his own personality: combining assertiveness and humility.

This theme of duality is further reflected in one of the last teachings of this chapter of Avos[116] in which Shamai states: "You shall receive every person with a cheerful countenance." The same Shamai who was known for his rigid and irascible nature,[117]

[116] Mishnah 15.

[117] See Shabbos 31a for illustrations of Shamai's nature, including the incident where he pushed a potential convert out of his house with a "builders rod," because of his disrespectful attitude towards Torah.

also demanded that we should greet every person with a cheerful countenance, an attitude that derives from humility and a reduced ego.

IV.

Moshiach, too, is the embodiment of these two paradoxical characteristics of assertiveness and humility.

There is a well-known discussion in the Talmud[118] about the two scenarios for Moshiach's arrival. The first scenario, taken from the Book of Daniel[119] is that Moshiach will arrive in a majestic manner, "on the clouds of heaven." Conversely, the Talmud cites a second, more humbling, scenario

---

[This rigidity, the Rebbe asserts here, was not due to Shamai's ego, G-d forbid, but, on the contrary, Shamai was a living example of how one could encompass these two paradoxical traits and use each of then when necessary. See below for further explanations for Shamai's apparently contradictory statements. –Translator's note]

[118] Sanhedrin 98a.

[119] 7:13.

based on the verse "poor man riding on a donkey."[120]

One could raise the question, how is it possible that Moshiach should arrive in such degradation, as "poor man riding on a donkey?" Aren't we at a rather advanced stage of readiness for the Redemption in light of the Talmudic declaration[121] that "all deadlines have passed, and the matter depends solely on *Teshuvah* (repentance, return)?" And since Teshuvah is a process that can occur instantaneously,[122] Moshiach's coming will thus be immediate, a process that is metaphorically consistent with coming "on a heavenly cloud."[123] How does one account

[120] Zecharia 9:9.

[121] Sanhedrin 97b.

[122] Zohar 1, 129a.

[123] [If Moshiach's coming would be forced on an unwilling and unprepared world, we can appreciate why his arrival will not be majestic and glorious, but like a "poor man riding on a donkey." Since, however, the Talmud establishes that Moshiach's coming is overdue and the sole barrier is our *Teshuvah*, the moment we do *Teshuvah*, we will be eminently ready for him. Hence his arrival will be a glorious event,

for the Talmud entertaining the scenario of Moshiach "riding on a donkey?"

In truth, there is no question that Moshiach will arrive "On a heavenly cloud." Most certainly, the Redemption will materialize in the most exalted and magnificent fashion. Even before the Redemption we will witness the fulfillment of Biblical prophecies as to how the Nations of the world will respect and serve the Jewish people To cite just two such prophecies: "And kings shall be your foster-fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers."[124] Or: "And they shall bring all your brethren out of all the nations for an offering unto the L-rd...as the children of Israel bring their offering in a clean vessel..."[125]

When our Sages discuss Moshiach's coming in the Daniel scenario as a "poor man riding on a donkey," it was not meant literally. Rather it reflects the mindset of Moshiach himself. Moshiach, even as he stands high,

---

metaphorically represented by his coming on "the clouds of heaven."-Translator's note.]

[124] Isaiah 49:23. See also *Zevachim* 19a.

[125] Isaiah 66:20.

assertive and regal—"On the heavenly clouds"—he will simultaneously be imbued with humility and self-abnegation—"A poor man riding on a donkey."

Moshiach's "riding on a donkey" is reminiscent of Moses, the first Redeemer,[126] whose journey to redeem the Jewish people was on a donkey,[127] underscoring the extreme humility and self-effacement of Moses, by virtue of which he earned the privilege of being their redeemer. This attitude of humility that facilitated the first Redemption applies to Moshiach, the "Final Redeemer" as well.[128]

The practical application of all of the above is the manner each of us must endeavor to incorporate and combine the two disparate attitudes of assertiveness and humility in the way we educate others.

On the one hand, we must follow the Mishnaic dictum, "Who is a wise man? One

[126] See Shemos Rabbah 2:4. Zohar 1, 253a.

[127] Exodus 4:20.

[128] See n. 125.

who learns from **every** person."[129] This conveys the message that one must possess the requisite humility to appreciate that he can learn from every person. To be sure, one must also be a "wise person" so as to know what it is that one can learn from another. However, the mindset that makes one receptive to learn from all is one that derives from humility.

Conversely, as our opening Mishnah states, one must also "raise up many students," by making a conscious effort to learn from one's positive knowledge. This is similar to the process of giving *Tzedakah.* Even a poor person is obliged to give something o another poor individual. Similarly, spiritual tzedakah to those who are spiritually impoverished[130] is an imperative for all. Even one, in his humility, who considers himself spiritually poor, as indeed one ought to, must desire to impart the scant knowledge of Torah and Mitzvos to others who are less fortunate.

---

[129] *Avos* 4:1.

[130] "There is no poor person save the one who is poor in knowledge." (*Nedarim* 41a. *Zohar* III, 273b.

May it be G-d's will that each and every one of us should implement the Mishnah's directive of "raising many students." This applies to one who humbly considers himself spiritually impoverished and certainly applies to one who is spiritually rich. This lesson is even more relevant to the arrogant person who thinks that he is knowledgeable, despite the fact that he is not. One must even utilize this unwarranted egotistical attitude to helping and teaching others.

Teaching others will bring not only brings light and enlightenment into the student's life, it also brings light to the teacher. As Daniel states: "And they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn the many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."[131] This introduction of light will usher in the state of "and for all of the Children of Israel there was light in their dwelling places" even in the last days of exile. Promptly and imminently, this state of light shall lead to the true and

[131] *Daniel* 12:3. See *Bava Basra* 8b that applies this verse to the teachers of children.

complete Redemption at which time "G-d shall be unto you a light to the world."

(*Adapted from the talk of Shabbos Parshas Kedoshim, 5744*)

ESSAY SEVEN
THE PROPHET SAGE

ESSAY SEVEN
THE PROPHET SAGE

1.

When the author of Avos listed the stages of the Torah's transmission from Moses onwards, it lists the prophets as one of the links in the tradition.

> "Moses received the Torah from Sinai, and passed it on to Joshua, Joshua to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, the **Prophets** passed it one to the Men of the Great Assembly."

The inclusion of prophets as individuals who were responsible for the teaching of Torah is problematic. Of what relevance is prophetic ability to the teaching and transmission of the Torah? Whereas the inclusion of "elders" is appropriate because, as the Talmud

states,[132] "Who is Zaken-elder, one who has acquired wisdom," a prophet is not an appellation that is associated with wisdom and Torah study. Likewise, the "men of the Great Assembly" were members of the most august body of Torah teaching and adjudication – the Sanhedrin. What qualifies the prophet as a link in the chain of Torah transmission?

On the contrary. The function of a prophet is to "speak of matters that will occur in the future."[133] A prophet is also charged with the responsibility to speak words of reproof; to "admonish people concerning the words of the Torah and to warn them not to transgress."[134] A prophet is actually precluded from active involvement in interpreting the Torah.[135] Why then does the Mishnah list

[132] *Kiddushin* 32b.

[133] *Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah*, beginning of Chapter 10.

[134] Ibid. Chapter 9:2.

[135] "A prophet may not introduce any new matter." (Rambam, ibid. 9:1).

prophet as one of the essential links in the transmission of Torah?[136]

II.

One may suggest that the Rambam in his commentary to the Mishnah anticipated this question. And though he does not address it explicitly, his comments serve to resolve the question about the inclusion of prophets.

Rambam in his commentary here refers us back to his general introduction to his commentary on the Mishnah. "The description of the transmission of the Torah we have already explained in the introductory essay to this work." In that introduction, Rambam writes:

> "Know that prophecy is ineffectual with regard to the interpretation of the Torah and of deriving the branches of the commandments by way of expounding the thirteen rules of interpretation... only what he may do that involves research and logic."

[136] See above Essays 1-2.

The Rambam echoed this distinction in his *Yad*[137] where he establishes the fundamental nature of the belief that the A-mighty endows prophecy to humans. Yet, he continues, a prophet may not introduce a novel idea of Torah. His sole function is to "cal upon people to serve G-d." However, he qualifies this when he states: "However, with regard to researching, clarifying logically and providing a rationale for the commandments, he is like any of the other sages who are like him who are not endowed with prophecy.

Subsequent to this introduction, the Rambam details the order of the transmission of the Torah: "Joshua bin Nun taught what he received to the elders... Afterwards, the elders taught that which they received from the mouth of Joshua to the prophets, peace be unto them. The prophets taught one another... until the era of the Men of the Great Assembly."

We can now appreciate the role of the prophets in the transmission of the Torah. Their role was not tied to their status as

[137] Ibid. Beginning of Chapter 7.

prophets. Were a prophet to have explained something logically as anyone else might have explained a matter logically, but, the prophet would add that G-d had confirmed that his idea was true-do not pay any attention to him." This intrusion of prophecy is unauthorized. The prophet is, however, entitled to offer a logical explanation of any Torah matter, just as any other sage, provided it is based solely on logic and reason, not on prophecy.

III.

This, explanations, however, begs a follow-up question. Granted, a prophet is no less qualified to expound the Torah than any other sage, why does the Mishnah give him preeminence? Why does the Mishnah emphasize that their role in the transmission of the Torah was due to their status as prophets? If the fact that they were prophets had absolutely nothing to do with their Torah knowledge, why would the Mishnah characterize them as prophets?

In truth, despite the exclusion of prophecy in the Torah transmission process, a prophet does have an edge with regard to the logical and intellectual aspects of Torah. And it is for this reason that they were chosen over others to be the ones through whom the Torah would pass over from one generation to the next.

One of the prerequisites for prophecy is wisdom. In the Rambam's words: "The spirit of prophecy does not dwell on an individual unless he is a **great sage**, a strong moral character whose impulse never prevail over him in nay matter whatsoever, but who utilizes his knowledge to prevail over his impulses. He is a master of **expansive, and correct knowledge, indeed, exceedingly so**."

This means that a prophet must possess, in addition, to prophetic abilities, also intellectual qualities. Moreover, the prophet must first acquire these intellectual achievements as a **prerequisite** to prophecy. Without these intellectual qualities he would not have been able to reach the ideal of prophecy.

Thus, the prophet, having attained the highest level of intellect, was eminently qualified—on par with the elders and the Men of the Great Assembly—to be the links in the transmission of the Torah.

(*Adapted from the talk of Shabbos Parshas Shemini, 5745)*

ESSAY EIGHT
TAKE AND GIVE

ESSAY EIGHT

TAKE AND GIVE

1.

The first Mishnah of Avos comprises two themes: First, Moses' receiving of the Torah and the order of its transmission through the Men of the Great Assembly. And second, the three maxims of the Men of the Great Assembly: "Be deliberate in judgment, raise many students and make a fence around the Torah."

The fact that the compiler of the Mishnah combined both themes in one Mishnah dictates that there is a thematic connection between the two.

Our Mishnah is expressive of the two criteria that are necessary for the study of Torah and service of G-d in general: constriction and expansion.

"Moses Received the Torah from Sinai."

The selection of the word "received" is instructive. It teaches us the need for us to be "recipients." Being a recipient is not just an act of listening to someone else's words, but it is a state of being completely open to what the other has to offer. When one is filled with one's own being and ego, that part is resistant to anything that comes from another, unless, of course, if that which the other says is completely in harmony with one's earlier perceptions. The idea of "reception" is where one's ego is constricted, leaving room for the knowledge imparted by others.[138]

\

[138] See preceding essay where the theme of humility was derived from the words "from Sinai," connoting that we must learn the lesson of humility from Sinai, "the lowest of all mountains." [In humility there are many components. Here the emphasis is on the aspect of being open and receptive to G-d's teachings. – Translator's note.]

"And passed it one to Joshua."

One must not be content, however, with receiving the Torah from others; with the approach of constricting oneself in order to receive the Torah. One must, as Moses, also possess the quality of expansiveness, to also "pass it on" and teach it to others. Joshua, similarly, was not content with his devotion to Moses' teaching, but enters into the expansive mode by transmitting what he received to the elders, the prophets and ultimately to the Men of the Great Assembly. Indeed, one's reception of Torah is complete only when it is transmitted to the next person and to the next generation.

The Mishnah therefore concludes, that the Men of the Great Assembly were not just passive recipients of the Torah from the preceding era of the Prophets, but they too had something to say. In fact, they said **three** things. And the fact that the Mishnah stresses that it was three things suggests that their mode of Torah expansion was complete, for it encompassed three pivotal teachings that are

representative of the totality of Torah which is identified as a "**Threefold** Torah."[139]

II.

This theme of expansiveness, notwithstanding the need for constriction and humility, is further reflected in the teachings of the Men of the Great Assembly:

"Raise many students."

Notwithstanding the necessary constrictive subordination of the student to the teacher and the caution and deliberateness in rendering judgments[140] – a teacher cannot

[139] Shabbos 88a. This explains the emphasis on the number three here. [It conveys the message that they were not content with just being recipients in the full sense of the word and then limiting their expansiveness. Rather they conveyed the totality of Torah; expansiveness at its most complete form. - Translator's note.]

[140] [As expressed in their first directive "Be deliberate in judgment." – Translator's note].

remain in that constrictive mode. He must raise up many students; the term many implying as many students as is possible. No holds barred.

"And make a fence around the Torah."

There is yet one more manner of demonstrating the expansive nature of Torah. It does not suffice to merely be a faithful transmitter of the Torah knowledge one received from his teacher going back to Moses at Sinai. A conscientious student must employ his own intellectual creativity in expanding the horizons of Torah. One follows the expansive mode of Torah by making fences around the Torah (based on the solid principles that one receives from his teacher) and legislating protective measures to deal with the exigencies of one's generation.[141]

With this introduction we will be able to understand why the author of the Mishnah used the term "**Raise up** [**literally: stand up**]

[141] "Make a protection for my protection" (*Moed Katan* 5a. See there for cross-references.

many students." The difference between standing and going in relation to a student is that when a student is content with understanding his teacher's ideas and can more or less, match his teacher's comprehension, this student can be described as standing. A good teacher is not satisfied to just adequately present his ideas to the student so that the student masters them without difficulty. Rather he guides the student to be intellectually innovative and creative, so that he does not stand in one place—even if it is the same exalted place that the teacher occupies—but that he travels and moves on to discover new intellectual vistas—"They go from strength to strength."[142]

In light of the need for a student's intellectual mobility, why does the author select a term whose literal meaning ("stand up") has the implication of a student standing in one place?[143]

---

[142] Psalms 84:8.

[143] One could argue that it could not have stated that the teacher should "move" many students or a similar

The answer to this question is that once the author underscored the importance of the teacher taking the expansive route in teaching Torah to a multitude of students and inspiring them to chart new territory, it is crucial that he add an important caveat: A student who is creative and innovative should know that all of his knowledge must **stand** on the solid foundations of his teacher's principles. Whenever a student is challenged with the rhetorical Talmudic question "How do you know this?"—he should always have an available answer as to the source of his novel idea.

---

expression, because the nature of innovation is that it is not just receiving knowledge from his teacher but forging ahead; and this, presumably, cannot be ascribed to the teacher. This argument, however, is not valid because the very fact that the student is creative is due to the guidance of the teacher. It is **imperative** that the teacher guides the student to become a mover. If so why stress, "*Stand* up many students," when the teacher does much more than that, he "moves:" them?

III.

There is a practical lesson that each and every one can derive from the above as to the need to synthesize the diametrically opposite modes of constriction and self-nullification on the one hand and expansiveness on the other hand, in one's approach to Judaism.

These two modes were first introduced at Sinai when the Jewish people declared, "*Na'aseh v'nishmah*-We shall do and we shall understand," constriction and expansiveness, respectively.[144]

Translated into actual life experience. One must begin by exhibiting submission to G-d and His commandments. More specifically, one must submit oneself to one's teacher of

[144] [In the original talk, Shabbos Parshas Naso, 5748, the Rebbe demonstrates how these two modes found expression in the two attitudes that were necessary for the building of the Mishkan and in the transporting of the Mishkan. In addition, the Rebbe also demonstrates how these two attitudes were present at the revelation at Mount Sinai and was expressed by the Jewish people in the days that they counted before they received the Torah. See there for the entire exposition.-Translator's note.]

Torah, from whom one learns G-d's Torah. This, in and of itself, enables one to become subservient to G-d. With this foundation one will approach Torah and Mitzvos with the attitude of "*Na'aseh*-We will do!"

G-d, however, endowed us with an intellect and with emotions that need to be utilized in one's spiritual development. Following the expression of readiness to do G-d's bidding, one must exhibit a spirit of independent and creative spiritual growth by applying one's own understanding to Torah study ("*Nishma*-We shall understand") and not be content with the submissiveness of the "*Na'aseh*-We shall do" mode. Not only with this independent spirit not weaken one's action—"the Essential thing is the deed"[145]—but also on the contrary, it elevates and enhances his actions. Now his actions are also a product of one's intellect.[146]

---

[145] *Avos* 1:17.

[146] [In the original discourse, the Rebbe discerns two levels within Nishma, comprehension of Torah. First one must learn and understand the teachings of one's master. One must then find new meanings and interpretations of Torah. In the process one must

Applying the same theme to the service of G-d, we can also discern the two modes of constriction and expansiveness. One's foundation in approaching G-d is the awe and reverence for Him, surrendering one's ego to Him. But this constricted mode must be the foundation upon which one builds serving G-d with love, expansively. This is what constitutes complete service of G-d.[147]

Parallel to the two modes of constriction and expansiveness with regard to one's personal service, are the two modes of relating to and influencing others. One should not be content with being a student, even if one succeeds in attaining the level where one completely absorbs and assimilates the teacher's idea to

---

flesh out the teachings that were nascent or general when they were given at Sinai. The scholar's contribution is that these teachings are now revealed in their full and expanded form. – Translator's note.]

[147] See *Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah* Chapter 10. Note the words of the *Zohar, Bamidbar* 128a (Recited in the "*Tikkun Leil Shavuos*"): "For us everything hinges on love, as it is written 'And you shall love G-d your G-d,' and it is written "From the love G-d has for you' and it is written "I love you, says the L-rd.'"

the point where one could attribute the idea to the student.[148] One must strive to become a teacher who develops and "raises up **many** students."

This directive applies to all, for every individual possesses unique talents and capabilities, which can be imparted to others.[149] And these new students, in turn, do not remain standing submissively on one place, but develop and grow to the extent that their knowledge is inspiring and infectious, bringing illumination to all.[150]

---

[148] *Avodah Zarah* 19a. See *Kiddushin* 32a ff.

[149] In consonance with the Mishnah's directive (*Avos* Beginning of Chapter 4): "Who is a wised person? One who learns from every person." This implies that there is something that one can learn from each and every person. Note also the law that requires even a pauper to give *Tzedakah*, charity (*Gittin* 7b. *Rambam, Hilchos Matnos Aniyim* 7:5. *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah*, beginning sec. 248).

[150] Note the law mentioned in *Parshas Beha'alosecha*, that the flames of the Menorah must "rise of their own accord."

IV.

The two foregoing attitudes assume even greater significance in modern times. Our generation—the last one of exile and the future first generation of Redemption—has the added distinction that its *Nasi*, its leader, my sainted father-in-law, commissioned each and every one of its members, men, women and children, as emissaries to disseminate Judaism in general and specifically the "fountains" of Judaism[151] (Chassidic teachings) to the farthest reaches of the world. He transformed each and every member of our generation into a "communal worker," who carries responsibility not only for himself but also for the dissemination of Judaism to all Jews in one's environs.

The very first approach to this role is submission to the leader. Study his teachings and accept his instructions with the ultimate measure of self-abnegation. This "surrender"

[151] [I.e., the teachings of Chassidus, that represent the inner dimension of Torah that was revealed in recent generations as a prelude to the "secrets" of the Torah that will be revealed by Moshiach.-Translator's note.]

of oneself to the *Nasi* is reflected in a Chassidic saying that regarded their birthday as the anniversary of the day that they first met the Rebbe of their respective generation, At that pint their previous identity ended and a new identity, akin to a newborn child, emerged.[152] This new identity a Chasid

[152] The emphasis is on the word "akin" because the newly acquired identity of the Chasid is of a superior nature to that of the newborn child. First, a newborn child experiences an apparent decline at birth. Previously, the fetus was taught the entire Torah (*Nidah* 30b), which it forgets at birth. Second, a newborn child is not capable of learning Torah. And when he finally does attain the age of comprehension, his learning is incremental. By contrast, when a Chasid comes to his Rebbe, he immediately receives all aspects of the inner dimension of Torah from the Rebbe, notwithstanding the existence of various gradations within that part of Torah (its "Scripture," its "Mishnah," etc.). Not only does he absorb its "*Aleph-Beis*," but even the most profound levels are also imparted to the Chasid at the very first time he comes to his Rebbe. (This is analogous to the fact that at Sinai, the Jewish people received all of the Torah, including its inner dimension. In fact, before the Ten Statements were spoken, they experienced unprecedented revelations of the mystical visions of the "Chariot" ("*Ma'aseh*

acquires can be compared to the Sinai experience, at which time they were regarded as converts to Judaism and as newly born children.[153] The Jews then acquired a totally new identity, one that nullified their previous existence. One might suggest that a semblance of this metamorphosis occurs when a Chasid comes to his Rebbe—in the context of learning the inner dimension of Torah—from him.

Once this new identity is forged, the Chasid is then charged with the mission of moving away from his state of submission. He must acquire a spirit of independence in his own personal spiritual growth matched by a concerted effort to "go out" and disseminate the Chassidic teachings that he had absorbed from his Rebbe; "Raise up many students" so that they too become "movers."

Merkavah"). In Biblical phraseology "They saw" (Exodus 24:10-11).

[153] Indeed, the laws of conversion are derived from the giving of the Torah at Sinai. (*Yevamos* 22a. *Rambam, Hilchos Edus*, 13:2. *Tur* and Shulchan Aruch, *Choshen Mishpat* sec. 30:11.

V.

When one considers the importance of disseminating Judaism in general and Chassidus in particular, a dilemma can arise. What does one do in a situation where there is no one around to whom one can impart one's knowledge? Alternatively, what does one do when one lives in a city that is saturated with scholars? How can one apply the pivotal directive of "Raising up many students" when there are no potential students to raise up?

To resolve this dilemma one can find an analogy in the laws of tithing. There are several tithes that one must separate from one's produce annually. Firstly, Maimonides rules,[154] one must separate *Ma'aser rishon*-the first tithe. This tithe will ultimately be given to the Levites. One must then separate a second tithe, *Ma'aser Sheni.* This tithe must be transported to Jerusalem where it is to be consumed by its owner with certain

[154] Beginning of *Hilchos Ma'ser Sheni*. This passage was part of the section that was studied on the day this talk was delivered in accordance to the daily study of 3 chapters of Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*.

conditions attached to it. In two years of the seven-year Sabbatical cycle—years three and six—one separates *Ma'aser Oni*, the tithe for the poor in place of *Ma'aser Sheni*. Maimonides underscores the importance of separating these tithes in their proper order.[155]

However, while Maimonides stresses that one must **separate** these tithes in their prescribed order, he mentions nothing of the order in which they are to be distributed. What counts is the act of separation and designation.

This conclusion is rather odd, particularly with respect to the tithe that must be given to the poor. Isn't the main objective of tithing that the poor person receives the produce that he needs?[156] Isn't the objective of the Mitzvah of Tzedakah to "give life to the soul

[155] *Hilchos Matnos Aniyim* 6:2 ff. *Hilchos Terumos* 3:23.

[156] This is exemplified by the law that one fulfills the Mitzvah of Tzedakah even if he loses his money and a poor person finds it. See *Sifri*, Deuteronomy 24:19.

of the poor person?"[157] Why does Maimonides put so much emphasis on the importance for the owner of the produce to separate the tithe in an orderly fashion, if the end result is that the poor man still did not receive his due?[158] What good is separating a tithe if it is not given to the poor?

The answer to this question conveys an important lesson and provides practical

---

[157] *Tanchuma, Mishpatim* 15. Indeed, tzedakah exists because of the very existence of poor people. This is derived from G-d's response to David as to why he created the disparity between rich and poor. "'Kindness and truth, who will preserve it?' If everyone was rich or poor, who would perform acts of kindness?" *Tanchuma (Mishpatim* 9) and *Shemos Rabbah* 31:5)

[158] With respect to the other tithes there is no issue, since there are those authorities (*Marginisa Tava* and *Kinas Sofrim* on *SAefer Hamitzvos* of the *Rambam, (shoresh* 12). See *Rashi, Yoma* 83a s.v. *ki pligi* and *Gittin* 30a, s.v. *v'af al gav.*) who maintain that the primary obligation is to separate the tithes and not the delivery of it to its intended recipients. This is based on the premise that separating of the tithe removes the prohibition of *tevel* (untithed produce). This does not apply to the tithe for the poor, where the objective is to provide for his needs.

guidance. Even when one is in a situation where there is no poor person, not even a charity collector, one still has the obligation to separate his tithe for the poor. Similarly with other forms of Tzedakah, one must always designate a percentage of one's income for the needy, even before there is a need. (Obviously, one must give it to the needy as soon as the need materializes.)

One can apply this same lesson to spiritual charity—the dissemination of Judaism and the teachings of Chassidus to the farthest reaches. Even if one were to be in a situation where there is no spiritually impoverished individual available to be mentored, one still has the obligation to shoulder the responsibility for others[159] and disseminating Judaism by preparing oneself for the ultimate task of spreading his knowledge.

Preparing for the giving of spiritual charity entails assessing one's ability to help others and finding the right words to help communicate the beauty of Torah and

[159] "All of Israel are responsible for one another" (Shavuos 39a).

Mitzvos, so that when the opportunity is there one can be equal for the task.

This attitude requires a businesslike mindset. One must be preoccupied with the notion that one's efforts at spreading Judaism are one's profession. For the true businessman there is no distinction—insofar as his involvement is concerned—whether he has a customer to serve or not. Even during his sleep he will dream about his business. Our Sages expressed this pro-active business mindset when they spoke of "The businessman money exchanger. When they bring him money to see, he sees it. And when they do not bring him money he seeks and brings his own."[160]

To be sure, one—either personally or through the assistance of another—must do whatever it takes to find the spiritually or materially poor person, and help him. But, if

[160] *Sifri* and *Rashi*, Deuteronomy 1:13.There he contrasts this attitude with that of "the rich money exchanger. When they bring him *dinarim* to see, he sees them. When they don't bring him he sits and is idle."

that is not possible, he has already the obligation to "separate" and designate one's money or resources for this purpose. Moreover, one must be just as conscientious about the preparation as he is about the actual giving of Tzedakah.[161] With the proper preparation and adequate efforts to find the recipient, G-d will bless these efforts with success. In the words of the Talmud, "A good thought is brought close to action."[162] How much more so, when it is not just good intentions but also one has already entered the mode of action by preparing oneself for the task.[163]

[161] See *Igeres Hakodesh* sec. 21.

[162] *Kiddushin* 40a.

[163] *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5702, p. 87. [In the original discourse, the Rebbe concludes with a lengthy appeal with respect to the absolute necessity to educate Jewish children who lack even the most rudimentary knowledge of Judaism. The Rebbe declares that this is real spiritual life saving of hundreds of thousands of Jewish children. See there for the complete text. – Translator's note.]

(*Adapted from the talk of Shabbos Parshas Naso, 5748. Published in Sefer HaSichos 5748, p. 470-477)*

ESSAY NINE

EARLIER AND LATER MORALITY

ESSAY NINE

EARLIER AND LATER MORALITY

1.

Pirkei Avos begins with a chronology of generations from Moses through the Men of the Great Assembly; how the Torah, which was given to Moses at Sinai, was transmitted by him to Joshua etc. The Mishnah then details three ethical directives that were authored by the Men of the Great Assembly.

It is perplexing that no ethical teachings of earlier generations were recorded in Avos. Didn't the rabbis, elders and prophets of the preceding periods have anything to say that would be worthwhile repeating here in Avos?

The answer to this question will become clear by way of an introduction concerning the

function of the entire Tractate of Avos. As was mentioned in the Introduction Avos is known in Aramaic as "*Mili d'chesidusa*- Matters of extra piety," because it is dedicated to the teaching of ethics that take us beyond the call of duty. *Avos* is the road map for delving **within** the laws of the Torah to find its inner soul. Hence the expression that a Chasid — a title ascribed to one who learns Avos[164]— goes "*lifnim mishuras hadin*, **within** the law."

One can raise a simple question. Why do we need a tractate that teaches us how to go beyond or within the laws that were given to us by G-d in His Torah?

Parallel to going beyond the law in the sphere of "doing good" are the rabbinic laws that have added on multitudinous strictures and prohibitions as a means to "desist from evil" that were not mandated by Torah law Here too, one may ask, why were the Torah's restrictions no sufficient? Why did the rabbis have to add on new restrictions?

[164] *Bava Kama* 30a.

11.

The *Alter Rebbe* explains the phenomenon of rabbinic legislation in his work, *Likkutei Torah*.[165] These restrictions were introduced during the Second Temple Era. Prior to that era, the Biblical laws sufficed and there was no need for additional legislation.

With the destruction of the first Temple and the advent of the second Temple, the spiritual caliber of the Jewish people declined and following Biblical laws alone would not be enough to maintain their spiritual equilibrium. As a result of the exile, their emotional faculties degenerated and the obstructions and concealments to the service of G-d intensified. In the Alter Rebbe's words "They increased so dramatically upon us to the point that we can no longer serve G-d with love. The only way we can arouse the intense love is by the observance of the intricacies of the additional rabbinic laws…"

And while it may seem that these rabbinic laws are of an inferior quality, in truth, the

[165] *Matos* 85a.

Alter Rebbe explains how these additional laws can be compared to a parent who will discipline his child by adding on additional restrictions out of concern and love for the child, so too, G-d, expresses His love for the Jewish people by adding on additional restrictions and safeguards to make sure they do not falter.

What is true with regard to the restrictions the rabbis imposed as a result of the degradation of the Jews in exile, the Alter Rebbe maintains, is it also true regarding the added ethical teachings that can be found in Avos. Earlier generations were on a higher spiritual plane and their service was of a more complete nature. To function on the appropriate spiritual and ethical level, there was a need for the teachings of Avos to inculcate the positive attitudes such as a "good eye."

It is now clear as to why no ethical teachings of the generations that preceded the Men of the Great Assembly were recorded in Avos. Only during that generation was there a need for the "matters of piety" contained within Avos.

III.

To be sure, there were always evildoers. From Moses down to the Men of the Great Assembly there were surely individuals whose behavior was wanting. Indeed, there were generations where the majority of the people were wicked. Why then was there no need for the ethical teachings of Avos in those times?

One can gain some insight on this matter from the Alter Rebbe's discussion in *Torah Or.* [166] There he states, "In earlier generations the souls were on a higher plane... Because they possessed this superior soul, they were able to draw the inspiration to exercise control over the evil embedded within their soul, from within their own souls. Immediately upon reflection... they will attain the sense of awe... Only the absolutely evil person deliberately allows the evil of his soul to prevail..." For this completely degenerate individual—whose awareness of G-dliness that prevailed in those times was of no avail—the teachings of Avos will also be futile. Conversely, the completely righteous

[166] *Miketz* 41a.

individual of the earlier generations did not need these matters of extra piety that represent the subject matter of Avos.

By contrast, in the words of the Alter Rebbe, "the latter generations consistently do not have individuals who are so wicked, nor do they have righteous individuals who are so righteous... their soul's own powers are not adequate to gain mastery over the evil..." Therefore, the latter generations need these "matters of piety" and can be helped by them.

(*Adapted from the talk of Shabbos Parshas Matos-Masei, Shabbos Mevarchim Menachem Av, 5746, Published in Likkutei Sichos volume 28, p. 283)*

I

ESSAY TEN
PRACTICAL TORAH

ESSAY TEN
PRACTICAL TORAH

1.

"Moses received the Torah from Sinai" are the opening words of *Avos*. The choice of the first word "Moses" poses a dilemma Moses was no more than an intermediary who brought the Torah from G-d to the Jewish people. Shouldn't the emphasis have been placed on the role that G-d played in giving the Torah? Similarly, the emphasis on the origin of the Torah from "Sinai" is problematic. Why stress the name of a mountain upon which the Torah was given rather than the Divine source of Torah?

The question is magnified in light of the objective of *Avos*. Unlike the rest of the Talmud, which is devoted to instructing us on the laws of Judaism, *Avos*, is devoted to teaching us how to go **beyond** the parameters

of the law. *Avos* is geared to a better understanding of the inner soul of the Torah, so that our commitment to it is not confined to the minimal demands of the law. Accordingly, it would have been more appropriate to underscore the Divine—hence, the unlimited—origin and character of Torah. There can be no comparison between the Torah as it is heard and received from Moses and the way it would have been had we received it directly from G-d. When the Jews asked for Moses to transmit the Torah to them[167] Moses was not so pleased[168] because it represented a diminution of the Torah.

Why then would Avos—which deals with the Torah in its trans-legal form—minimize the Torah's sublime nature by stressing Moses role as an intermediary, rather than G-d's role as the source of Torah?

Had the Mishnah been interested in informing us about the legal ramifications of

[167] Exodus 20:16. Moses response was "You weakened me like a female." (Rashi, Deuteronomy 5:24)

[168] See Rashi, Deuteronomy 5:24.

Torah—as is the case with respect to the rest of the Talmud—one could have understood the appropriateness invoking the role of Moses on Sinai. Moses was the greatest Torah jurist of all and Moses' legal stature was at its peak when he stood on Mount Sinai, where he stood physically apart from all others, including his brother Aaron.[169] By placing the imprimatur of Moses at Sinai on this Tractate, it would have demanded scrupulous observance of the laws contained herein. However, since Avos is not a legal compendium, but a treatise that goes beyond the law, stressing G-d's involvement would have been more appropriate.

A follow-up question concerns the very first teaching quoted in this Mishnah: "Be deliberate in judgment." After highlighting the process of receiving the Torah and its exalted nature, one would have expected that the first set of teachings—in a tractate devoted to "matters of extra piety" no less—would reflect the uniqueness of pure Torah study. Instead the Mishnah focuses on the

[169] *Rashi*, Exodus, 19:24.

applied aspect of Torah—justice. True, the Mishnah does not focus on the law itself, but rather on the extra measure of piety one must apply to the execution of justice ("Be **deliberate** in judgment"). Nevertheless, it would have been more fitting to commence this tractate with a message that conveys the sublime character of Torah study.

To be sure, Torah rulings and the execution of justice are also integral parts of Torah. However, they do not necessarily involve the process of study and analysis. Indeed, those laws that are said to be "*Halacha l'Moshe m'Sinai*-a law that was given (orally) to Moses at Sinai" generally defy rationale thought. In the words of the Talmud: "If it is Halacha, we shall accept it. If it is a law (based on logical premises) an argument can be advanced."[170] These laws we obviously observe despite our lack of understanding of them.

Hence, in a tractate that highlights the origin of Torah, it would have made more sense for it to commence with teachings that reflect

[170] *Yevamos* 76b.

the importance, beauty and sublime nature of Torah study.

This question applies to the second teaching of Avos, "Raise up many students." If the focus of the Mishnah was Torah study, it should have stated, "**Teach** many students," which involves the process of learning. On the contrary, to "raise up many students" it does not require formal study. One could "raise up many students" by influencing Jewish children to go to a Yeshiva or other Jewish school where they will be taught Torah faithfully, consistent with the belief that "Moses received the Torah from Sinai."[171] If so, this second directive of raising many students does not express the singular virtue of Torah **study**.

In truth, this question can be applied to a host of teachings that appear in this first chapter of *Avos,* including the directive that

[171] See *Kesubos* 103b. *Bava Metzia* 85b: "How great are the **deeds** of *Chiya*." R. *Chiya* was known for his practical efforts on behalf of facilitating Jewish education. His efforts did not include formal teaching, yet he was credited with raising many students.

appears at the end of the chapter, "The essential thing is the **deed**, **not** the study." How do we reconcile this emphasis on deed with the focus on the exalted nature of Torah that appears at the opening of this chapter?

II.

When the Torah was given at Sinai, there were two layers of knowledge that were transmitted. Contextually and sub-textually, **all** of Torah knowledge, the Written Torah and the Oral Torah, including also the novel interpretations that have been introduced over the millennia by some worthy students, were embedded within these Ten Commandments.[172] Overtly and textually, however, only practical laws and commandments were articulated in the Ten Commandments. The commandments, "Remember the Sabbath," "Do not steal" etc. are all straightforward directives as to what we should and should not do.

[172] See Exodus 20a "All of these words." See also *Shemos Rabbah* 28:6. Beginning of 47.

By stating, "Moses received the Torah from Sinai" the Mishnah conveys an important directive: We must approach Torah, first and foremost, the way it was presented at Mount Sinai. One must realize that the ultimate in Torah study—that which makes it complete—is when it has a practical application.

Learning Torah with a practical outcome in mind is not only important because of where the Torah study is heading, but the process of study itself is enhanced when one knows that there will be practical ramifications that will follow the academic exercise of study.[173]

True, even if one were to study Torah without the objective of applying it to one's behavior it would still fulfill the obligation of Torah study. Avos, however, endeavors to guide us so that we go beyond the letter of the law. From the vantage point of Avos as "matters of piety" the ultimate and complete form of Torah study is when one can derive from it practical guidance.

[173] See *Hemshech* 5666, p. 406ff.

The Mishnah thus continues, "Be deliberate in judgment," with the emphasis on the word "judgment" that implies a practical matter of law.

And the emphasis to "**raise** up many students" as opposed to: "**teach** many students" is to underscore the practical angle of teaching Torah. It must lead to producing many students and it can be done either by teaching or by recruiting students and by providing financial support for their study.[174]

Likewise, the third directive mentioned in the beginning of Avos, "Make a fence around the Torah" points to the objective of action. Hence the term "**Make** a fence..." See to it that the Torah study leads to more conscientious observance of the Mitzvos.

III.

The study of Avos has been divided into two periods. According to one custom it is studied in the six Sabbaths that precedes the Festival of Shavuos, as a preparation for the

[174] See *Medrash Shmuel* on *Avos* ad loc.

receiving of the Torah that we celebrate during this holiday. There is also a second custom, to continue studying Avos throughout the entire summer, up until the last Sabbath before Rosh Hashanah.[175]

[175] Prefatory note in *Alter Rebbe's Siddur*. See also introductory essays of this book.

ESSAY ELEVEN

REFINEMENT THROUGH TORAH

ESSAY ELEVEN

REFINEMENT THROUGH TORAH

1.

When surveying the first Mishnah of Avos we are struck by the way the author combined apparently disparate themes in one Mishnah. The Mishnah begins with a list of recipients of Torah and how it paws passed on from Moses—who received it at Sinai—to Joshua, and from Joshua to the elders etc. until it was passed on to the Men of the Greta Assembly.

After presenting us with this chronology of events concerning the transmission of the Torah, the author then proceeds to give us a sampling of three of the ethical teachings of the Men of the Great Assembly. The only linking phrase between these two distinct parts of the Mishnah is "They said." Wouldn't

it have been more appropriate for the author to divide these two apparently unrelated themes into two separate Mishnayos?[176]

II.

We will understand the organic connection between the two parts of the Mishnah by first analyzing the very reason for reciting[177] and studying Avos in the weeks that follow the Passover Holiday.

One of the reasons given for the study of Avos after Passover[178] is that the study and implementation of the ideals of Avos serves

[176] See preceding essays.

[177] See *Alter Rebbe's Siddur* where he writes: "*Reciting* Pirkei Avos" and others. See also sources cited in the next footnote.

[178] *Abudraham, Seder Y'mei Ha'omer. Siddur Admur Hazaken* ad loc., and other sources – cited in *Bein Pesach Lishavuos,* (Chapter 5, sec. 28:b, p. 159). There are, only "*some*, who have the custom to do this all the Sabbaths of the summer (*Siddur, Admor Hazaken* ibid.). See also above in the introductory essays.

as a preparation for the receiving of the Torah on Shavuos.[179]

One may add the following point: This function of the study of Avos as a preparation for the giving of the Torah is analogous to that of the counting of the Omer. Avos is characterized as a tractate that teaches and cultivates proper ethics and good character traits.[180] Likewise, the Counting of

[179] "One who learns Torah must first know the approach to its study and the way one must conduct oneself after learning it. They therefore instituted to study it [Avos] before the Festival of Shavuos so that the hearts of each and every Jew should be receptive to accept the Torah with a complete heart and to conduct themselves properly, in complete accord with its teachings." (*Midrash Shmuel* ibid). *Abudraham* there adds: "Because they (i.e., the Sabbaths between Passover and Shavuos) are days that are counted towards the Giving of the Torah, we therefore count these days, as a loving friend who waits for the arrival of his loving friend from a journey and counts the days and nights until he arrives. Most matters contained within this tractate are geared to encourage us to read the Torah and observe its precepts."

[180] *Bartenura*.

the Omer is intended as a means to refine all[181] the character traits of our animal souls.[182]

This explanation, however, begs a question. Why would the study of Avos, which commences on the very first Sabbath that follows the Festival of Passover, focus primarily on the preparations for Mattan Torah? Moreover, Avos actually begins, not with directives of how to prepare for Mattan

---

[181] "From *Chesed ShebeChesed* (the attribute of kindness within kindness), to *Malchus ShebeMalchus* (the attribute of leadership within leadership).

[There are a total of seven character traits that are listed in Kabbalah. Each one of the seven comprises all the other attributes, so that there are a total of 49 attributes of the animal soul, corresponding to the 49 days between Passover and Shavuos. The implication of this point is that these days of counting are geared towards refining every nuance of the animal soul. – Translator's note].

[182] This is symbolized by the fact that the Omer offering consisted of barley, rather than wheat that is used for all other flour offerings in the Temple. Barley was used primarily as fodder for animals and not for humans. Hence, the symbolism of this offering that was brought on Passover was the need to refine the animal souls. (See *Likkutei Torah*, *Emor* 36a ff. *Shir HaShirim* 24c and other references.)

Torah, but rather with Mattan Torah itself: "Moses received[183] the Torah at Sinai," followed by the chain of tradition, as the Torah was transmitted from one generation to the other. This forces us to conclude that study of Avos focuses not only on how to prepare for the giving of the Torah, but actually contains within it a potential aspect of the actual receiving of the Torah.

The question thus is: Why, immediately following Passover, do we focus our

[183] Indeed, the terminology employed here is: "Moses received," in the past tense, suggesting that we are in a state of having already received the Torah.

To be sure, relative to this year's revelation of *Mattan Torah* (Giving of the Torah), we are still in the **pre**-*Mattan Torah* mode. We therefore are in need of the process of refining our nature (by Counting of the Omer and the study of tractate Avos), so as to enable us to be receptive to the revelation of this year's Mattan Torah.

The above is even more pronounced in light of the well-known exposition that Mattan Torah actually innovated the entire concept of the synthesis between the "upper" spiritual realms and the "lower" physical realm (*Tanchuma, Va'*eira 15. *Shemos Rabbah* 12:3 and other sources).

attention—when commencing the study of Avos—on the process of receiving the Torah and the preparations for it? Should not our study of Avos then be primarily a continuation of the Passover festival? Why then is the emphasis placed on the preparation for *Mattan Torah*?

III.

The Exodus from Egypt that is associated with Passover was not an end. It was a prelude to Mattan Torah. Thus the Torah states: "When you shall take this nation out of Egypt they will serve G-d on this mountain."[184] Before G-d gave and before the Jewish nation received the Torah there had to be the exodus from Egypt, because this liberation came as a result of a Divine revelation: "The supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed is He, revealed Himself to them—in His essence and glory—and redeemed them."[185] In Chassidic nomenclature

[184] Exodus 3:12.

[185] *Haggadah Shel Pesach*, s.v. *Matzah zu* and s.v. *Vayotzi'einu*.

this is known as an *Isarusa d'l'eila*, the "the effusion of an independent arousal from Above."[186]

By first introducing this G-dly revelation during Passover, we are empowered to respond by "Counting the Omer" with its spiritual connotation of self-refinement.[187] By virtue of our own efforts at self-refinement—involving all of the 49 attributes and characteristics, we can then be receptive to the revelation from above that occurred on the 50th day—the day on which G-d gave us the Torah. What this entailed was that in addition to elicitation of 49 gates of holiness, we could access even the most sublime and transcendent level that is referred to as the

[186] See *Likkutei Torah, Vayikra* 1c. *Shir Hashirim*, 24c.

[There are generally two forms Divine forces are generated into this world. The first is when G-d, initiates a spiritual awakening in the world. The second is G-d's response to an awakening that we initiate. –Translator's note.]

[187] This response that involves our effort at self-refinement is known as :*isarusa d'lisata*, an arousal from below.

"fiftieth gate."[188] Indeed, we can even access the aspect of G-d that defies any and all categorization, level or modality.

The fact that this revelation from above comes after our own efforts during the days of *Sefirah*-(Counting) entails that whatever it is that is revealed on Shavuos can be internalized and integrated within our own personalities.

If we trace the spiritual dynamic of Mattan Torah (and its concomitant revelation of the "Fiftieth Portal") back to its genesis,[189] it is

[188] See at length *Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar*, 12a ff. [There it is explained how] there are actually two levels within the "fiftieth gate." The first and lower level is within range of the 49 levels, whereas the higher level is completely above and beyond the 49 levels. Both of these levels are generated on Shavuos.

[189] [Whereas—"down below"—in our finite experience, a potential state lacks actualization], in the spiritual realms—"above"—potential does not lack actualization. (See *Pardes*, Portal 11, Chapter 3, cited and expounded on *in Sefer Hamitzvos* of the *Tzemach Tzedek, Mitzvas He'emanas Elokus*, Chapter 11. *Hemshech* 5666, p. 5ff. 139 ff. S.v. *Shuva* and *V'lakachtem* 5671.)

clear that it began with the initial revelation of "the Holy One blessed is He" that occurred during Passover. For it was this initial awakening from above that inspired us to engage in self-refinement, which, in turn, led to Mattan Torah.

In effect, the revelation of Shavuos, essentially, already existed during Passover. The difference being that when this Divine energy was generated on Passover, it was only of a temporary and fleeting duration insofar as the recipients were concerned. To be capable of making this revelation permanent and to internalize it, it required a step-by-step effort—albeit aided by the inspiration of the initial Divine revelation from Above. Finally, when G-d actually gave the Torah to the Jewish people, the initial revelation of the Exodus (the revelation of "The Supreme King of kings, the Holy One Blessed is he, in his own honor and glory")

[Thus, from G-d's vantage point all of the revelations that are elicited on Shavuos are actually present—in their entirety—during Passover, the time when the potential for these revelations originated.-Translator's note.]

was made permanently and inwardly manifest down here below.[190]

This revelation that exists in potentia during Passover is even more obvious now after Mattan Torah. In the present day and age—subsequent to Mattan Torah—one can gain access to the revelation of Mattan Torah even during Passover.[191] [192]

---

[190] In addition, the revelation of Mattan Torah is truly of a more sublime nature than that of the Exodus.

[191] This concept is analogous to the spiritual dimension of eating Matzah. [There were two levels of eating Matzah on the night of the Exodus: The Matzah that was eaten before mid-night and the Matzah that was to be eaten after mid-night, when the revelation first occurred. The latter was of a much higher spiritual nature.] Despite the fact that we now eat Matzah before mid-night, nevertheless, because we are living in a post-Mattan Torah era, our pre-mid-night Matzah enjoys the same exalted status of the revelation of the "Supreme King of Kings etc." that was originally generated after mid-night. In truth, it even goes beyond that because this revelation that is generated by the Matzah we eat subsequent to Mattan Torah, is enhanced by virtue of the observance of Torah and Mitzvos throughput the year, before Passover. See s.v. Matzah zu, 5749

IV.

We can now appreciate why we learn Pirkei Avos in each of the Sabbaths between Passover and Shavuos, and why we commence that study—on the very first Sabbath after Passover—with "Moses received the Torah at Sinai etc."

No sooner does one enter into Passover, one already possesses the potential for and the means to realize all that will follow until and including the revelation of "Moses received the Torah at Sinai"—Mattan Torah. This is particularly true on the first Sabbath following Passover, for the Sabbath is the day when all of the preceding days are elevated and assume a higher character.[193]

---

for a lengthy exposition on this matter, and see there for cross-references.

[192] Although, relative to Mattan Torah of each new year, it is regarded as being before Mattan Torah, as stated above f. 184.

[193] This perfection and enhancement that the preceding days attain on the Sabbath is expressed by the word(s): *Va'yechulu* (And he completed. (Genesis 2:1. See *Or Hatorah* on this verse (P. 42b ff. *Chukas* 508a ff., and other sources.)

And therefore one studies Avos—with its opening reference to Moses receiving the Torah at Sinai—during the very first Sabbath that follows Passover (despite the fact that the actual revelation of Mattan Torah will not happen until after the forty-nine days of counting), because that is when this revelation of Mattan Torah really begins.[194] Knowing that we already have the potential for this matter and even its beginning provides us with the knowledge what is incumbent upon us during the days of Sefirah: to elicit the "Moses received the Torah at Sinai" from the potential to the actual at Mattan Torah.

[194] See also *Chasam Sofer* on tractate *Pesachim* (at the end) and in his commentary to the Shulchan Aruch (end of sec. 430:5) where he states how from the Exodus from Egypt the process of Mattan Torah began, in reference to which it is stated: "There he placed for him a statute and a judgment," and "This is the month for you" which is the first Mitzvah...We therefore engage in the study of Avos during this period because they provide us with the chain of tradition fro Moses, peace be unto him, as well as the protective fences that surround the Torah and the custom of those who engage in its study and its honor.

However, to help manifest this openly one must first learn about "ethics and morality" and implement these teachings into practice, which is what *Sefiras Ha'omer*"—Counting of the Omer is all about.

V.

To translate the above concept into practice, the Mishnah continues with the three teachings of the Men of the Great Assembly:

When we speak of the study of Avos as a preparation for Mattan Torah, it is not only because it refines our nature, but primarily because it constitutes a time for a new dimension of Torah study. This is clearly seen from the fact that the study of Avos begins with the statement that Moses received the Torah at Sinai before its directives designed to refine our character traits.

It is therefore fitting that this is an appropriate time for adding new dimensions of Torah study which came from Moses who received it on Mount Sinai. This includes all of the Written as well as the Oral Law as the

Rambam explains in his introduction to *Perush Hamishnah* and Mishneh Torah.

We can now understand the connection to the second half of the Mishnah. As Rashi[195] puts it, these three instructions are needed to ensure the continuation of the transmission of Torah to future generations.

Likewise the directive to be deliberate in judgment and making a fence around the Torah are needed to ensure the preservation of the Torah.[196]

Moreover, Moses was the first to implement this directive of establishing many students, for he was not content with transmitting the Torah to his disciple Joshua; he also personally taught Torah to the entire Jewish people.[197]

Moses was thus a prime example of teaching Torah to 600,000 Jews of that generation and indeed to all Jews of all generations.

---

[195] See also Bartinura and Midrash Shmuel.
[196] Ibid.
[197] See *Eiruvin* 54b, cited by Rashi, end of *Parshat Tisa.* Introduction of Rambam to his *Perush haMishnah.*

Thus, the connection of the first Shabbos after Passover to Moses receiving the Torah at Sinai is twofold:

First, it represents the giving of the Torah in its potential state, as a consequence of G-d's revelation during Passover. This is the part that comes from G-d's initiative and our reciprocal response to learn Torah with a renewed impetus.

Second, at this point we also initiate the process of establishing many students that parallels the following of the rabbinic enactments (preserved in the Oral Law).

VI.

When we fulfill this rabbinic directive to establish many students, we actually fulfill a Biblical commandment. There are many examples of rabbinic requirements when performed provide us with a fulfillment of a Biblical Mitzvah.

For example, although the requirement to remember the evil nation Amalek once a year,

each and every time we do so, constitutes the fulfillment of a Biblical Mitzvah.

Prior to the performance of the Mitzvah one has the option to choose doing another Mitzvah. However, once one has commenced the execution of this rabbinic requirement or custom, one has actually fulfilled a Biblical command.

Similarly, paradoxically, although one does not have a Biblical obligation to establish **many** students, one can satisfy the Biblical Mitzvah of teaching Torah to your children-students, by teaching Torah to only few students. However, when one does teach Torah to many students, one fulfill that same Biblical commandment. Teaching Torah to one's first student or to one's thousandth student constitutes the fulfillment of the same Biblical Mitzvah.

This premise makes an even tighter connection between the directive to establish many students and "Moses received the Torah at Sinai." When establishing and teaching Torah to many students one not only fulfills a directive of the Sages, but also

one of Biblical proportion, as Moses received it from Sinai; not just the teachings that were to be revealed subsequently though the ages.

All this points to the premise that during the first Shabbos following Passover we already prepare for and experience the revelation of Torah from Sinai in its potential state. This realization demands our response by a renewed impetus of Torah study.

(Adapted from *Sefer Hasichos* 5749, volume 2, p. 405-409)

ESSAY TWELVE
AS IT IS TAUGHT IN HEAVEN

ESSAY TWELVE
AS IT IS TAUGHT IN HEAVEN

1.

Pirkei Avos is dedicated to the teaching of ethics. The very first Mishnah—after delineating the order in which the Torah was transmitted from Sinai through Moses and subsequent generations—contains three inaugural teachings that were imparted to us by the Men of the Great Assembly: "Be deliberate in judgment; Raise up many students; and make a fence around the Torah."

Our Sages teach us that whatever G-d commands us to do, He also performs.[198] Accordingly, since these three teachings were

[198] *Shemos Rabbh* 30:9.

given to us by G-d, it follows that He would observe them as well.

II.

"Be deliberate in judgment" can be applied to the way we are judged from "Above." If our generation, which is so spiritually wanting, were to be judged hastily and superficially, it would not fare that well.

When, however, we are judged deliberately and one reflects on the causes that led to the lowly state in which we are situated, the results will be significantly different.

The first thing that can be said in our defense is the general state of enhanced spiritual darkness in which the world is now shrouded.

Second, even before the decline of our generation, we already had a valid defense. The mere presence of the soul in a physical body has a numbing effect on the soul due to the body's ability to compromise Divine truth. As the famous *Chosid, Rashbatz* once quipped that a human being is "Supernal

wisdom contained in a sack of meat, bones and seething blood."

When one considers the above, and particularly, when one considers the increased measure of darkness in our own day and age, we could expect to be judged rather favorably. Not only should we not be blamed for our wanting behavior, moreover, we will be commended for the little good that we do possess This minimal amount of good should evoke a sense of amazement. It is incredulous that notwithstanding all of the spiritual constraints and obstacles, how incredible it is that we managed to do so well.

This positive assessment of our situation leads to yet a more far-reaching conclusion—encapsulated in the words "And Raise up many students." This means that G-d is not content with those of us who are presently "Your children, G-d's students,"[199] but He incorporates within His circle of students and raises up "many" others who are presently in

[199] *Isaiah* 54:13.

the category of evil-doers or even worse.[200] All of them are converted into the category of "Your children, the students of G-d."

How does one who has been so far from G-d, come closer? What is the mechanism for G-d to bring even the "outsiders" into His fold?

To answer these questions, the Mishnah continues with its third directive: "Make a fence around the law," which simply means to enact new laws. Frequently, the impediments to getting closer to Judaism lie in the formidable nature of certain of its demands. One may have an aversion to the standard practices of Torah, or is "turned off" to certain basic Mitzvos, to use the vernacular.

To facilitate every Jew's going in the right path, G-d has provided us with more opportunities. If one avenue of Torah was closed to an individual because, that individual may find a new law—that was

[200] See general letter for Passover 5717, and *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 1, Passover, p. 252.

enacted by the rabbis and sanctioned by the Torah—and thus a new avenue to Judaism[201].

III.

While the system works in the order that it is delineated in the Mishnah, first G-d is deliberate in how He judges us. This generous mode of judgment, in turn, leads to greater inclusion, that G-d includes even the ones who have strayed the most from Him. To facilitate their return to Judaism, G-d sees to it that there are more opportunities and avenues, by "making fences for the Torah," new laws and new opportunities.

One could also see how this process works in the reverse. By enacting new laws as a fence around the Torah, we can attain the goal of "raising up many students," which, in turn leads to "being deliberate in judgment."

[201] This idea is consonant with the Talmudic statement, (*Makkos* 23b): "G-d wanted to bestow merit on the Jewish people, He therefore multiplied the amount of Torah and Mitzvos. See Maimonides' *Commentary on Mishnah* and *Chidushei Agados* there.

By erecting fences around the Torah, and extending the frontiers of Jewish observance, the Jewish people were provided with more opportunities to serve G-d. Even those, for whom Judaism had no appeal, will find something they can embrace when they realize the added requirements, which are, in actuality, added opportunities. As a result, there will be the fulfillment of "Raise up many students," that many more Jews will overtly become "Your children, G-d's students."

With the added opportunities to be connected to G-d and with the concomitant increase in the number of G-d's students, the Jewish people will experience the third ideal of "Be deliberate in judgment," a reference to the future Redemption, about which the Prophet states, "With peace and tranquility you shall be saved." With the future Redemption, as opposed to the Exodus from Egypt, there will be no need to rush. With

deliberate steps we will all march to the *Geulah*.[202]

(Adapted from the talk of Shabbos Mevorchim Iyar, 5717. Published in Likkutei Sichos, volume 4, p. 1180-1181.)

[202] [The Exodus from Egypt happened hastily as the Torah emphasizes. Chassidus explains that that was because the Jews were not sufficiently refined. If they had tarried they would have been overcome by the deleterious influences of Egypt and would not have been worthy of being redeemed. Not so with regard to the future Redemption.

At that time we will have undergone the proper refinement necessary for redemption. In this essay, the Rebbe provides the explanation how this can be so in considering that there are so many Jews who do not seem to be within the fold. To allay this concern, the Rebbe establishes that by virtue of the rabbinical enactments of the Sages, even those who were estranged from Judaism can find a "hook" on which to hold on to, to be included among G-d's students. -Trans. note.]